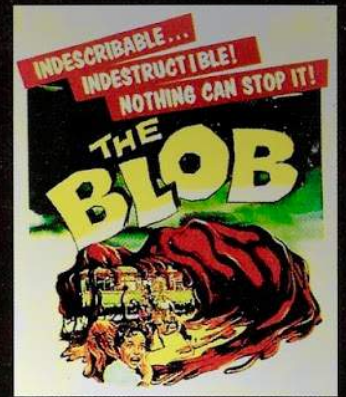


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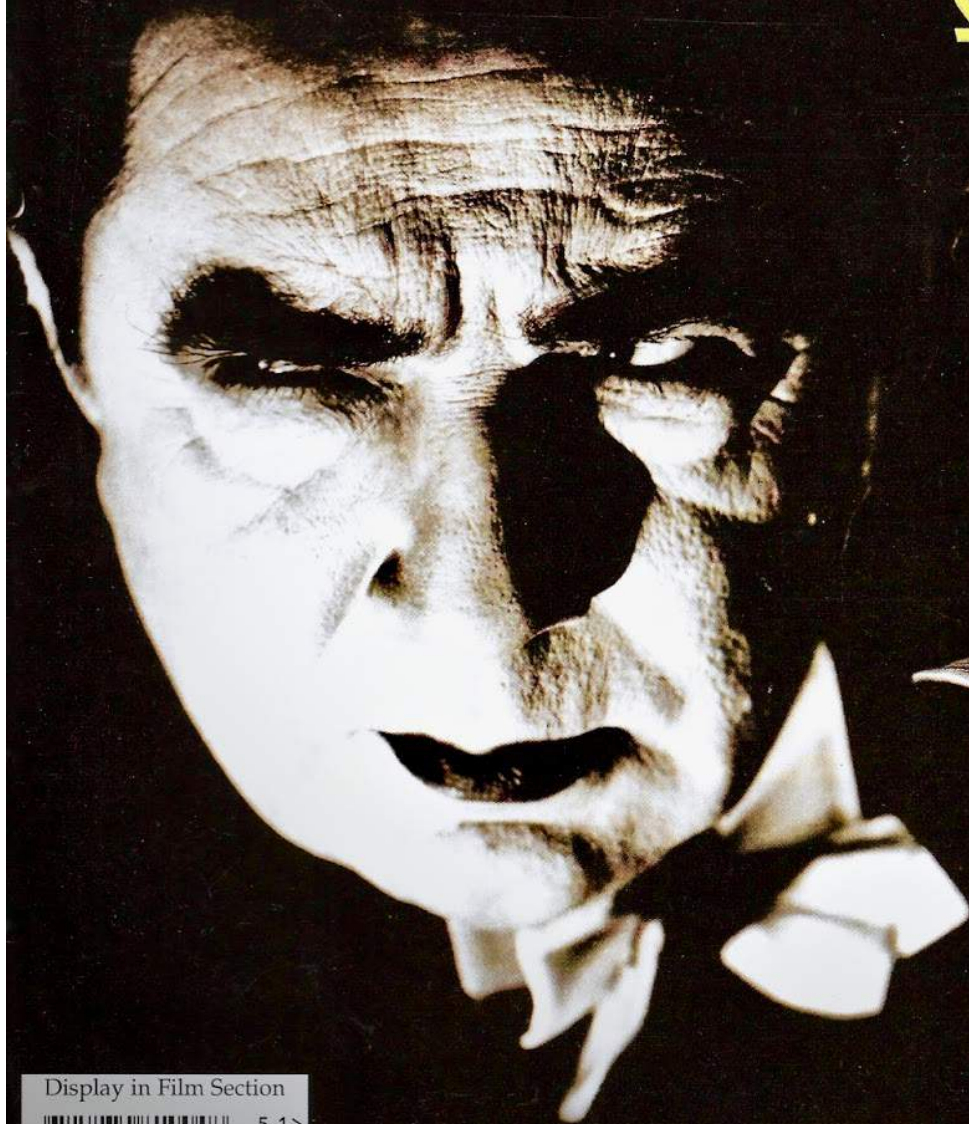
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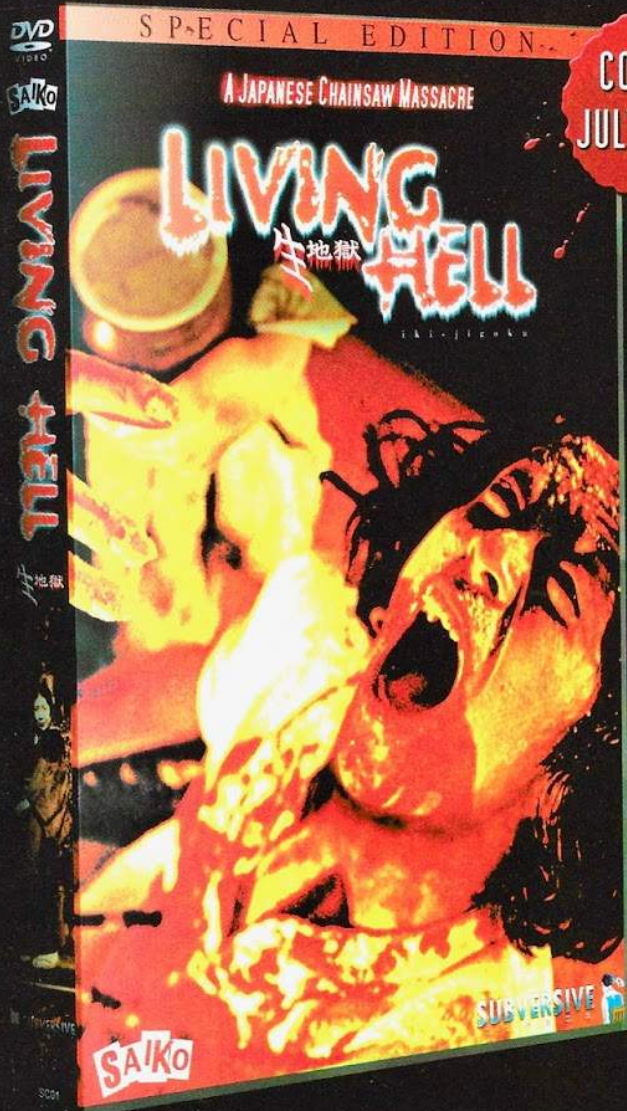


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COVER: Bela Lugosi in ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN (1948), Hugh Jackman as VAN HELSING (2004), THE BLOB (1958).

Scarlet Letters

Thanks for the copy of *Scarlet Street* #50! I had already picked up an issue at Barnes & Noble a few days ago—and was delighted with it. You guys have done one helluva good job.

Sorry you used that awful picture of me (although FJA and Verne Langdon both look like movie stars). I look like I swallowed Tor Johnson!

James Warren
Elkins Park, PA

We—ahem!—we wondered what had become of him, Jim...

Thank you, Richard Valley, for the lovely review of my book *Kritzerland* in *Scarlet Street* #50. It's always gratifying when someone so "gets" the book (or books—*Kritzerland* being the middle book in a trilogy). Writing them, I had no idea if anyone would care or empathize or have any of the experiences I had—but, as it turns out, many people apparently did, which is lovely.

But, enough about me—the brand spanking new 50th issue is a corker, a bountiful bag of goodies. Loved Ken Hanke's *HORROR HAGS* deux, and especially loved the Debbie Reynolds interview. (And just where is *THE SINGING NUN* and *TAMMY AND THE BACHELOR* on DVD?) I don't know what I think of the naked pix of my old pal Michael Burns. Michael and I did a pilot for CBS way back when, and he also starred in one of my musicals of the early seventies. Great guy—now a highly-respected professor and author (with a big book on the Dreyfuss affair). And how much do we love Julie Harris? This much! (Makes big gesture with hands.) Congrats, and keep up the good work, boys.

Bruce Kimmel
Studio City, CA

Happy big #50 to all the gang down on *Scarlet Street*!!! Once again you give us great reading that stretches the boundaries of the medium. I know the pressure must have been on you to make this milestone a good one, but really—you needn't have worried.

First, I appreciated the *FOUNDING FATHERS* kickoff to this issue. It filled in some minor blanks I had about the origins of *Scarlet Street*, as I haven't been a reader since the beginning. It was absolutely great to see pictures of Forrest J Ackerman and James Warren back together again. I know they had been out of contact for years and this sure caps a happy reunion. Hope to see more of those guys! Mr. Valley, keep us posted!

I really have the feeling that a magazine like *Scarlet Street* was the direction that Forry was trying to steer *Famous Monsters* toward, back when he was involved with its rebirth—that his original readers had grown up, but would ap-

preciate the familiarity of the old FM. Well, you guys are doing that and more! I love how you always seem to have a theme each issue that ties a lot of the interviews and other features together.

I don't think you need to worry about the term "horror hags," because Ken Hanke describes the meaning behind it quite completely at the end of his in-depth, two-part feature *ATTACK OF THE HORROR HAGS*. It is indeed a product of its time. That's the thing about *Scarlet Street*—as with all good teachers, it starts me off in a place I'm familiar with and then takes me beyond that point into a world I never really knew existed. Of course, along with being informative, you're fun! What else could one say about John Ireland's little gem about Joan Crawford? Hey, you slipped that one in real nicely (so to speak).

I enjoyed the great interviews with the ladies (Kate Phillips, Julie Harris, and Debbie Reynolds), who happened to escape the "hag" tag yet nonetheless relished the parts they played as much—if not more—than their counterparts. Heck, I would have never guessed that Debbie Reynolds produced *WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HELEN?*! The style in which each interviewer (Leonard J. Kohl, Chris Pustorino, and Richard Valley) conducted each conversation makes you feel like you're right there with them, talking to a friend. But that's the way things are on "the Street," too. For those who haven't visited *Scarlet Street*'s website, you'll find it's one of the friendliest neighborhoods on the internet and a pleasure to visit as much as the magazine is fun to read.

WANTED! MORE NOISEMAKERS LIKE...



Charlie Callas



Finally, there's Ken Hanke's story on *THE GREAT CHAN BAN*. One thing I abhor is an attempt to suppress history. We're never going to progress as a society if we continually cover our tracks. To suppress that which was once judged under a completely different set of rules, simply because we now see it in a different light, is wrong. And it's happening a lot with computer "enhanced" changes to old films, the whitewashing of original titles from silent classics, and the outright banning of the Chan films. We'll never know who we are if we don't know where we came from.

To wrap up, let's not forget your regular departments—*THE NEWS HOUND*, DVD Reviews, and Book Reviews. I always learn things about the latest releases that I otherwise wouldn't know.

Thanks for another great issue! May we be so fortunate to enjoy your continued success. Happy 50th!

John Stoskopf
Redford, MI

JEEPERS CREEPERS: GREAT SONGS FROM HORROR FILMS is a triumph for all concerned. I'd put off buying *Scarlet Street*'s first CD, but took the plunge when I saw the ad again in *Scarlet Street* #50. The CD has given me hours and hours of listening pleasure. I hope my fellow *Scarlet Street* readers will take my advice and buy this exciting, beautiful album at their first opportunity.

Joe McGrath
Seattle, WA

Congratulations on *JEEPERS CREEPERS: GREAT SONGS FROM HORROR FILMS*. One minute it had me laughing out loud at the comic numbers (Alison Fraser singing "The Blob" and Kathleen Helmond on "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?") and the next it was tugging on my heartstrings (the touching "The Faithful Heart," lovingly performed by Rebecca Luker). Please please please record another CD!

Betty Schmidt
Brooklyn, NY

Whether we produce another CD—we certainly *want* to, believe me—depends entirely on sales for *JEEPERS CREEPERS*. I can only echo the wise words of Joe McGrath hovering overhead and point all faithful *Scarlet Streeters* to the ad on pages 16 and 17. Order *JEEPERS CREEPERS*:

Continued on page 10

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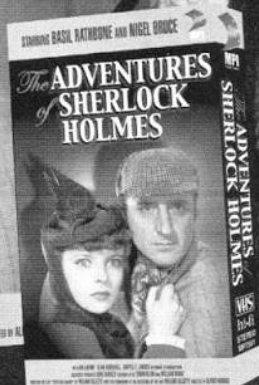
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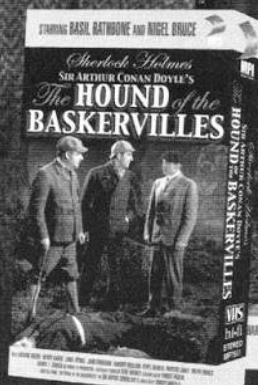
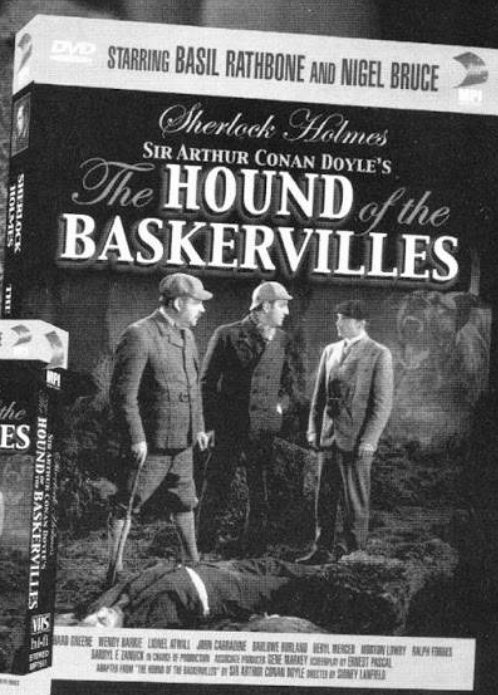
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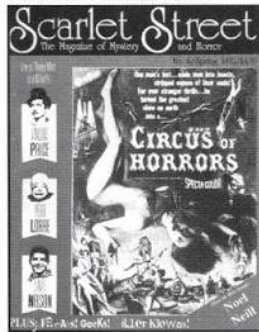
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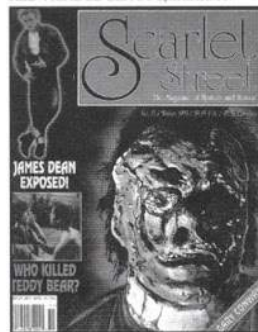
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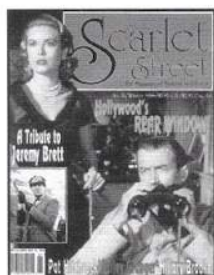
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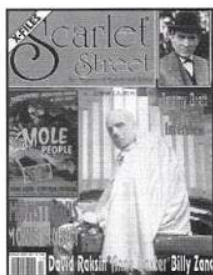
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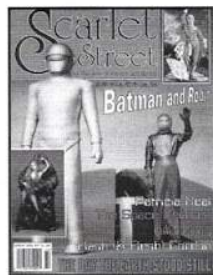
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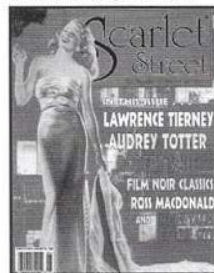
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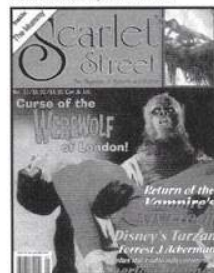
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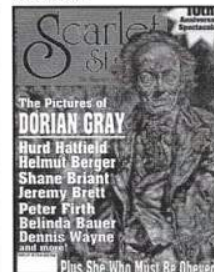
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#39: Curt Siodmak, Gene Evans, John Agar, DONOVAN'S BRAIN, BRAIN FROM PLANET AROUS, THE X-FILES, SHADOW OF FU MANCHU, YGOR: Horror's Cock-eyed Optimist, Forry Ackerman, THE LADY AND THE MONSTER, and more!



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#42: Shane Briant, THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY, Ursula Andress, SHE, Curtis Harrington, Robert Tinnell, Crosby, Hope, and Lamour: The Road Pictures, Elizabeth Shepherd, David Peel as Dorian Gray, USHER, Zacherley, and more!



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#44: Christopher Lee, Harry Alan Towers, THE FACE OF FU MANCHU, SHE, Lurking Upon the Rooftops: Fantomas, Gunfight at the DVD Corral, Record Rack, HORATIO HORNBLOWER, Don Dohler, The Many Faces of Christopher Lee, and more!



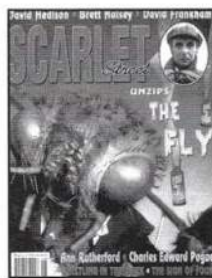
#45: NERO WOLFE, Christopher Lee, Maury Chaykin, Harry Alan Towers, Pulp Fiction, Tim Hutton, BRIDES OF FU MANCHU, Bruce Kimmel, THE FIRST NUDIE MUSICAL, THE ADVENTURES OF ELERY QUEEN, Dr. Mabuse on DVD, The Night Stalker comic, and more!



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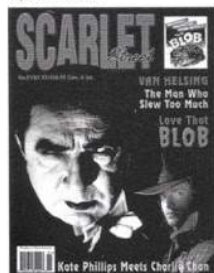
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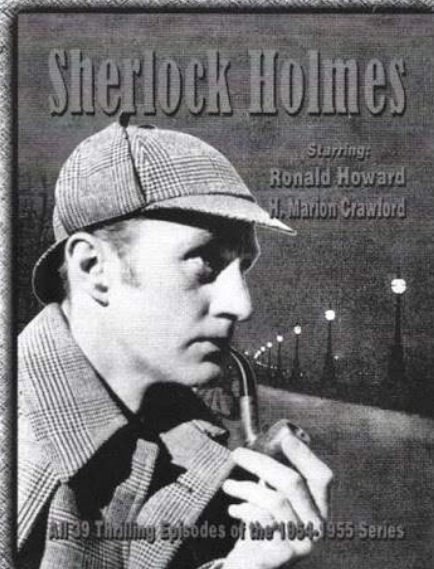
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SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 4

GREAT SONGS FROM HORROR MOVIES
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Bette Davis and Joan Crawford—will there ever be another like these two? And I feel privileged to have heard stories from two people who actually knew these two formidable ladies.

When I was a student at the School of Visual Arts back in the seventies, my painting instructor and friend, John Button, knew that I was a Bette and Joan fan, and called me aside one day. He said, "I have a vintage photo here that I'd like you to see." He showed me a black-and-white photograph of himself, taken in the 1950s, his body semi-wrapped around a wing chair. Seated in the chair, holding a glass of scotch and a cigarette, was . . . Bette Davis. My jaw dropped! "You knew her?" John then proceeded to tell me about the time when the two of them were sitting on the floor of Bette's cabin in Maine, drunk. Bette proceeded to tell her tale of woe. "Frances Dee, Sonia Henie—they all got rich husbands. Not 'Aunt Bess.'" (Miss Davis used to refer to herself as "Aunt Bess.") Bette continued, "My marriages were all failures." John interjected, "What about Gary Merrill?", to which Bette replied, "Oh, that geek!"

Bette's words on Joan Crawford? "You know, we really shouldn't have done that picture together; she's just a cheap

Hollywood actress." Bette also affectionately referred to Joan as "her" and "that phony cunt." John said that Bette was tough and could be difficult, but was very down-to-earth and warm, which really came as no surprise to me. However, my feelings about Joan, which were fueled by Christina Crawford's now-legendary hatchet piece *Mommie Dearest*, were reinforced by what a former neighbor told me, sometime later, in the late eighties.

My neighbor, Vivian, had worked for Pepsi-Cola in the late sixties and early seventies. Joan worked out of her apartment in NYC for Pepsi. The executives couldn't stand her, and wanted as little to do with her as possible. When Vivian was asked, "Would you like to work for Joan Crawford?", she jumped at the chance to work for a "famous movie star." Vivian told me that to call Joan a "witch" would have been kind. Joan trusted no one, was an alcoholic and a liar, and was just miserable.

On her first working day, Vivian was shown into the living room by Joan's longtime maid "Mamacita," who was actually a tiny, elderly German woman. Vivian was given a drink (Joan believed in having a "happy hour" every day), and began petting Joan's Shi Tzu, Princess. Mamacita warned her, "Oh, Miss Crawford do not like people to pet the dog." Princess jumped up onto Vivian's lap, her drink spilled, and pandemonium ensued.

Joan used to save her magazines to give to her "twins," the two girls she had adopted after Christina and Christopher. The twins weren't twins at all, but Joan always referred to them as such. Vivian said that one was very nice and quiet, the other one a total bitch. (Twins of Evil?) Joan once accused Vivian of stealing the magazines. On another occasion, around Christmastime, Vivian received a call from Betty, a woman who worked for Joan in Los Angeles. Betty told Vivian, "Oh, Miss Crawford is very annoyed and hurt because you didn't thank her for the Omaha Steaks she sent you for Christmas." Vivian told Betty that she never received any steaks for Christmas. When she confronted Joan about it, Joan said, "Don't lie, Vivian; don't lie." And heaven help you if you disturbed the Queen Bee's nap! (Joan took a nap every day, probably to sleep off the 100 proof vodka she drank.)

And what about Joan's famous trips for Pepsi? Vivian told me that, whenever Joan was to go on one of her trips, it was "International Crisis Time." Joan used to travel with several dozen pieces of luggage, and would have poor Mamacita travel up and down the elevator several times, hauling the Queen Bee's luggage. "Mein Gott!" Mamacita would exclaim, her chores made even more difficult because Joan never let her have a key to the apartment! Eventually, Mamacita took a trip to

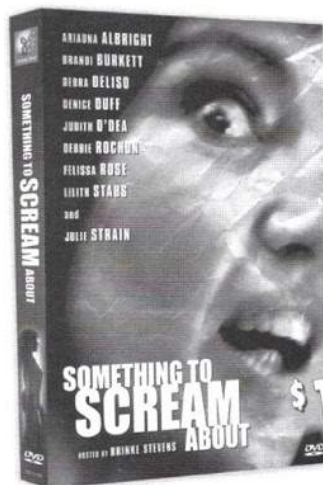
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visit her family in Germany and became quite ill, delaying her return. Joan fired her! "Oh, that ungrateful Mama-cita!" Joan told Vivian.

I don't recall Vivian telling how or why she stopped working for Joan, but I felt I had gotten some pretty priceless dish on Mommie Dearest! Vivian regretted not having saved any of Joan's very abusive memos to her, as she felt they probably would have fetched a lot of money!

Michael Wilk
 Howard Beach, NY
 Oh, that ungrateful Vivian....

I am a *Scarlet Street* subscriber and have all issues. Also love Sherlock Holmes, though Nero Wolfe is a close second.

I just purchased the first two Sherlock Holmes DVD Collections and noticed that Richard Valley wrote the notes. That is the reason for this letter. The late Gertrude Astor was our dearest friend and she's always mentioned as being in *THE SCARLET CLAW*. The notes mention a "ghastly murder" at the beginning and Miss Astor crawling to the church ringing the bell and dying. This is never shown, though it may have been shot—and, if so, why was it cut out? There is a very brief cut of the corpse's face, yet it looks nothing like Gertie. Gertie was a tall blonde—very blonde. The only other shot of the corpse is also brief and is a long shot of the body on a table, where the features can't be

made out. Why would Gertie get credit for playing a corpse—and it wasn't her—and why is she mentioned at all? Any help you can advance me on this would be greatly appreciated.

Alan Grossman
 Florence, OR

The role of Lady Pennington is without credit in the film itself. Regarding Gertrude Astor's height and hair color, it's possible that the blonde actress wore a wig—and, playing a recumbent corpse, it's difficult to determine her height. Many of Astor's roles surrounding *THE SCARLET CLAW* (1944) were brief and uncredited, including bits in *REAP THE WILD WIND* (1942), *THE CLIMAX* (1944), and *DRAGONWYCK* (1946). If indeed it isn't Gertrude Astor at the start of *THE SCARLET CLAW*, I'd like to know, too—but every source I've consulted lists her.

The 50th issue of my favorite film journal—*Scarlet Street* by name—was a milestone in achievement. From David Del Valle's look at Sherlock Holmes on DVD, to Ken Hanke's survey of the Charlie Chan controversy, to Richard Valley's interview with Debbie Reynolds—it was a sterling show all the way. I hugely enjoyed the second part of Ken's look at Hollywood's Horror Hags; his exploration of the stranger patches in the careers of these legendary actresses was handled with wit and style. It was also a great opportunity to evaluate the varying degrees of success these ladies achieved in their genre work, all the

way from the superlative highs of *WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HELEN?* to the painful lows of *FLESH FEAST*.

Scarlet Street has come a long way—and for my money it's the most intelligent and professional periodical for horror and mystery out there. With 50 issues of unparalleled excellence established, the future looks bright indeed—at least as far as *Scarlet Street* is concerned.

Earl Roesel
 Newport, KY

In response to the article entitled *THE GREAT CHAN BAN* in Issue #50, I have to say I'm disappointed, but hardly surprised. As a fan of Charlie Chan films, I would like to see them come out on DVD, but I'm not holding my breath. The big question that I have when such groups as the NAPALC and NAATA go after a particular old movie series or TV shows because of portrayals of certain ethnic groups that may not be deemed politically correct today is where does it begin and end? What criteria are they using? I can't see the Chan films because of supposed negative Asian stereotypes, but AMC shows *BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S* with regularity. In this film, Mickey Rooney gives what is probably the most embarrassing portrayal of an Asian by a white actor in a major film. Should we ban the Marx Brothers' movies because of Chico's exag-

Continued on page 14

Frankly Scarlet

Ever have an absolutely, positively vivid memory of something that never really happened? No, I don't mean that steamy weekend with your favorite movie star or that winning lottery ticket; I'm talkin' memory here, not wishful thinking.

For instance, there are those film fans who insist that they once saw KING KONG (1933) complete with the thrilling—but never filmed—spider pit sequence. Others contend that, when Karloff the Uncanny first went for a little walk as THE MUMMY (1932), it was in full view of the audience and not just the brief shots of his wrinkled hand and bandages. For years I vividly recalled a shocking color insert shot (of a bloody body tumbling out of an air vent) in the black-and-white IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE (1958) that simply doesn't exist. (On the other hand, I also vividly recalled a color insert in 1958's THE RETURN OF DRACULA—of a wooden stake being driven into actress Virginia Vincent's vampiric heart—and I was right about that one; it's definitely there.)

And then there's The Mysterious Affair of the Horror Hags. When we started preparing Ken Hanke's recent two-part article on fright films starring actresses "of a certain age," I was reminded of a monster mag from the sixties that used the phrase "horror hags" to describe the stars of this particular subgenre. Trouble was, I couldn't for the life of me remember the name of the magazine. "Well," said I to myself, "someone besides me is bound to remember it; I'll simply ask a few learned friends and post a question about it on the Scarlet Street Message Boards. Problem solved!"

Problem unsolved! Nobody knew! Oh, everyone had suggestions for the publication in question (among them *Mad Monsters*, *Horror Monsters*, *Castle of Frankenstein*, and *World Famous Creatures*), but no one recalled the actual article. Practically everyone remembered the spoof that ran in the 100th issue of *Mad* magazine, though, titled "Hack, Hack, Sweet Has-Been." (Message Board member Don Mankowski thought the *Mad* title was "Eight Old Tomatoes in that Itty Bitty Film Can," but that turned out to be a subtitle.) No one could pinpoint the article itself, not Forrest J. Ackerman (which effectively took *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and *Monster World* out of the running), not Bob Burns (which put the kibosh

on *Fantastic Monsters of the Films*), not nobody, not no-how...

Obviously, it was IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE all over again. I had a memory of something that had never actually existed, like that steamy weekend with—well, never mind. We ran the two-parter in *Scarlet Streets* #49 and #50, defended the phrase "horror hags" against those few who thought we were being intentionally insulting to some of the screen's greatest actresses, and gave up the search. And then—wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles—a letter arrived from reader Tony Rogerson:

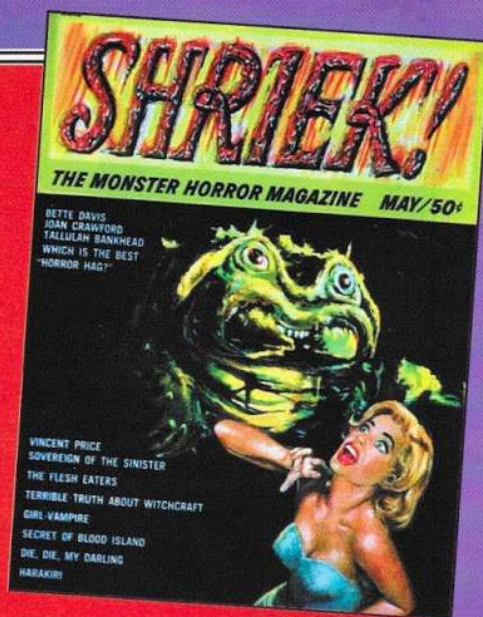
I just finished reading *Scarlet Street* #50. I've been reading since Issue #37, and the latest issue was as usual interesting and eclectic. (What other magazine features Forrest Ackerman, Sherlock Holmes, and Debbie Reynolds?)

Here in England, *Scarlet Street* takes a few extra weeks to reach us, and so you have probably already got many answers regarding the 1960s magazine that invented the term "horror hags," but if not...

I think the magazine you are looking for was *Shriek!* issue #1, dated May 1965. The cover has a caption "Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Tallulah Bankhead—Which Is The Best Horror Hag?" The article inside, which repeats the question, is primarily devoted to the film *DIE! DIE! MY DARLING!* and an interview with Tallulah Bankhead. The magazine was printed in the USA, but the editorial work appears to have been done in England. (Publishing information states "Designed and produced by The House of Horror, London for Acme News Co. Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York.") The articles feature mostly films produced in England.

The only other copy I have of *Shriek!* is issue #3 (dated Summer 1966). I don't know how long the magazine lasted. It is not particularly impressive, and I suspect I only bought it at the time because there were none of the other monster magazines on sale. I hope this information is of some interest.

I'll say it was of interest! I practically *Shrieked* with pleasure, though my naturally reticent nature forbade such a display of emotion. As it turned out, *Scarlet* scribe Farnham Scott had mentioned *Shriek!* on the *Scarlet Street* Message Boards—but, since no one seemed to have a copy of *Shriek!*, no one could say with any certainty that its staff had coined the phrase "horror hags." (For those demanding proof, you'll find the cover of *Shriek!* #1 and the title page of



Joan Crawford: the terrorist. As the sea-monster in *STRAY*. JACKET



Bette Davis—Joan Crawford—Tallulah Bankhead
Which is the Best Horror Hag?
Turn page and see our vote, because...

that publication's horror hags article picture on this very page.)

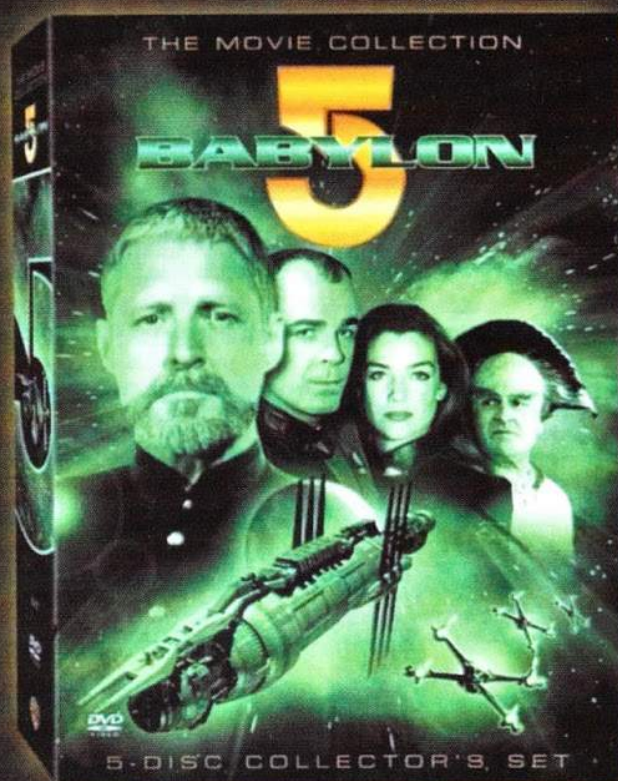
Anyway, that was it—the answer! I wasn't recalling something that didn't exist! I wasn't having a premature senior moment! (Yes, premature; I'm not quite that old yet.) I was vindicated!

Now, if I could only find that color insert shot from IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE...

You meet old friends in some of the oddest places, don't you? I've been reading Agatha Christie's Miss Marple stories of late, and what should I find in a tale from 1932 titled "The Affair at the Bungalow" but a pseudonymous character with the name—Sir Herman Cohen!

Richard Valley

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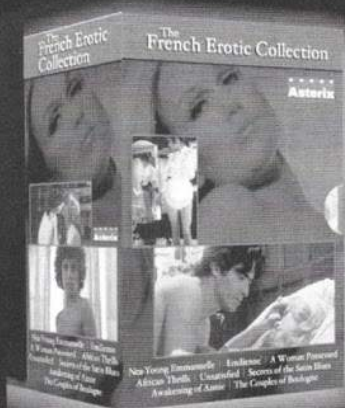


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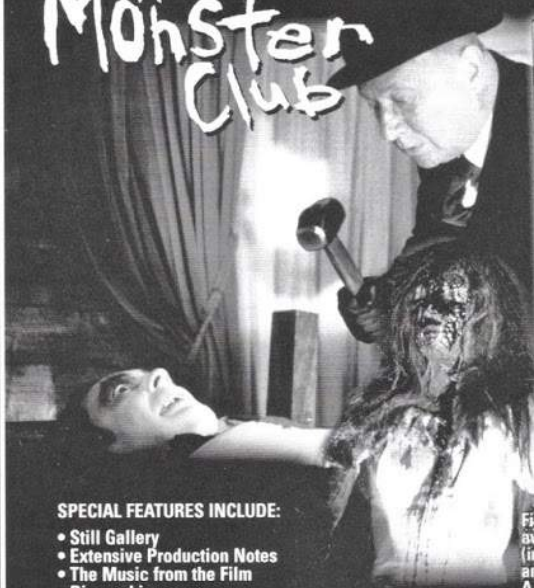
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SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 11

gerated Italian mannerisms or THE SEARCHERS because Henry Brandon plays an Indian? Isn't the point of acting to play something you are not?

Do you recall the silly uproar over the OUR GANG comedies about 10 years ago? It died down when some of the still living actors from the series pointed out that everyone in the series was treated equally and equally made fun of and that Stymie usually came through as the one with the most brains. My coworkers are aware that I collect old films. It's ironic that the only people who ever ask me if I can get tapes of AMOS 'N' ANDY are older African-Americans who grew up with it and think it was funny. If you want to nitpick, most movies made before 1950 probably have something in them that would not be appropriate in a contemporary film. These politically correct police types ought to grow up and do something more constructive than worry about a 70-year-old B movie series. The TV stations and DVD companies need to grow balls and not cave into this nonsense or else who knows where it will end. It seems today some people are bent on rewriting history and want to take out anything that might be offensive. It's wrong to accommodate them. These films are historical and have to be viewed within that context. If so, they can continue to be highly enjoyable to fans and serve as an example as to how far we have come—through we have a long way to go.

Tom Parrott
Middletown, CT

"Political correctness" is forever taking a beating, but what is it, really, but consideration for our fellow human beings? Yes, it's often carried too far, but there's nothing wrong with the concept itself. That's not a call to censorship. It's fine to suggest that old films featuring stereotypes should be viewed as historical, but we can't expect viewers to automatically make that distinction. The answer is not in banning films, but in presenting short history lessons (introductions on television, VHS and DVD audio commentaries and liner notes) that address the issues. Education is the solution, not censorship on the part of those who take offense—or insensitivity on the part of those who can easily dismiss complaints because their own feelings haven't been hurt.

Another fine issue! David Morrill's letter points up how often you need a "score card" to keep track of what bits from which stories wind up in which films. Here's a few that come to mind:

The climax of Chaney's PHANTOM OF THE OPERA comes from the book *The Invisible Man*—when that Claude Rains film was made, they changed the ending so it wouldn't be repetitive. The Rains PHANTOM, however, while jettisoning almost the entire PHANTOM plot, did use the book's climax. Similarly, NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN went back to the original book ending of *Thunderball* after the 1965 version changed it to make it more visually exciting; in the long run, the 1965 change was right. Meanwhile, the pre-credit sequence of THUNDERBALL is swiped from the climax of the book *You Only Live Twice*, two years before that was filmed—no

wonder it didn't turn up in that film. And of course, the climax of the book *Moonraker* turned up in the movie THE SPY WHO LOVED ME, which precluded its use in the 1979 film. SPY itself took the central core of its plot from—get this—the newspaper comic-strip adaptation of the novel, which, like so many Roger Moore SAINT TV adaptations, included a lot of new material to flesh out short stories. FOR YOUR EYES ONLY includes adaptations of both its title story and "Risico" as parts of its plot, but also includes a scene from the book *Goldfinger* that was left out of that movie, and the climax of the book *Live and Let Die*, which was left out of that movie. LICENSE TO KILL, of course, includes several whole sequences from the book *Live and Let Die*, notably "He disagreed with something that ate him" and the gunfight at the fish house, while I'd swear the airplane-to-truck jump stunt was inspired by the climax of the book *The Avenging Saint*.

Disney's 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA reveals Nemo's origin—which was not in the book—and has nothing in common with the one in the Verne book *The Mysterious Island*, but instead seems taken from the silent film of that name! (See? Nobody in Hollywood knows how to read books.)

As Alan Grossman said in SCARLET LETTERS, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear* have been overlooked. (The Arthur Wontner film barely used any of it.) At the time Christopher Lee did his two four-hour Holmes miniseries, he also recorded a book-on-tape of *The Valley of Fear*, doing all the voices in a wide va-

riety of accents. If you didn't know it was all him, you'd never guess! What untapped talents the man has!

Kate Phillips' comments about Ricardo Cortez remind me of a film I caught on TCM last month—WEST OF SHANGHAI. Boris Karloff plays a "bandit," Fu Yen Fang, in China posing as a General. Going from town to town, looting, pillaging, killing—it's just like Eli Wallach in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, except this guy has a very peculiar code of honor, and some likeable traits about him. He also speaks terrible English, but has a sidekick, Mr. Chang, who speaks the best English of any character in the film. Among the cast is Ricardo Cortez, who in his time played Sam Spade, Perry Mason, and a villain in one of the Mr. Moto films. He's a businessman in this, trying to win back the love of his estranged wife, but along the way, we also see he's almost as untrustworthy, double-dealing, and ruthless as Fang. Even though he looks like the nominal hero when the film starts, by the last quarter you really hate his guts! What an amazing piece of work for a little 65-minute flick!

Your HORROR HAGS feature was incredibly well-done, if maybe a bit too long. But what's this? You just couldn't resist finding an excuse to slap a few pics of half-naked guys in there, could you? (Jimmy McNichol's my favorite!)

I caught Piper Laurie last month in APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH, Peter Ustinov's sixth (and last) Hercule Poirot

film. I can tell you I was really disappointed. I blame the director, Michael Winner. The guy seemed to have no idea what the hell he was doing! My sensibility about storytelling seems to have developed recently to the point where, when I see something wrong, something bad, something incompetent, I really notice it, and it hurts to watch.

I've watched THE NIGHT WALKER twice, and enjoyed it thoroughly both times. Somewhat schlocky it may be, but it's good schlock and, at least on the first viewing, a genuine mystery that kept me wondering. I also had the truly bizarre circumstance of somehow finding the old song "Goodnight Irene" wedged in my head that day, not knowing I'd be watching a movie that night about a woman plagued by nightmares, named Irene! (One of those TWILIGHT ZONE moments, I like to call 'em.)

Nice pic of Stella Stevens. But what—no Julia Duffy pic, after your vivid (and entertaining) description of her Jason Vorhees routine? Shame! (She was on the fifth season of DESIGNING WOMEN, and while her character, Alison, started out as a pint-sized monster, she gradually softened by season's end. I found myself really liking her in spite of her personality disorders.)

Terrific Debbie Reynolds interview! She sounds like a tremendous lady, and somebody not afraid to speak her mind. The story of the guys saying "we have our orders" as they burned film negatives reminds me of a similar story

concerning DOCTOR WHO. In the seventies, the BBC wiped huge amounts of original videotapes, figuring it was supposed to be a "reusable" medium. They apparently believed the licensing department had film copies, while the licensing department routinely destroyed film copies that they felt had no further licensing value, figuring the BBC still had the original videotapes. Someone doing research one day ran across a room filled with a small mountain of WHO-related film prints—all scheduled to be destroyed—and saved them at the last minute. But there's still well over 100 episodes missing to this day. It's like the movie BRAZIL—civilization brought down, not by evil and corruption, but by bureaucratic incompetence!

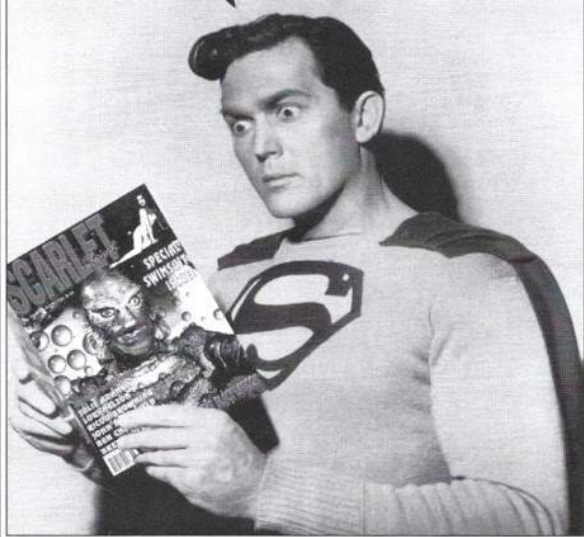
Henry R. Kujawa
Camden, NJ

Hail to the Street! And (though I'm sure its been said many times, many ways) congratulations on the big five-oh! *Scarlet Street* # 50 was a joy from cover to cover, with great photo layouts and use of color. There seems to be an increasing number of color pages, and they certainly contribute to the ongoing quality of the book.

And what a lineup! The FOUNDING FATHERS salute was most fitting. Mystery and horror fandom owes much to those guys, as indeed it does to the legendary Horror Hags. Ken Hanke's concluding

Continued on page 80

Great Krypton!
Scarlet Street has
revealed my secret!



Yes, kids, it's the *Scarlet Street* Slightly Mangled Special. We have in our vaults some issues with minor defects: price tags glued on the covers, a folded page, a gypsy curse scrawled on the classifieds . . . nothing too grim, but enough to render them unsuitable for sale at the usual rate.

So, now's your chance to get the *Scarlet Street* you've been missing! Just fill out the coupon and we'll send you copies that, in the words of Ygor, are "broken, crippled, and distorted"—just a teensy bit.

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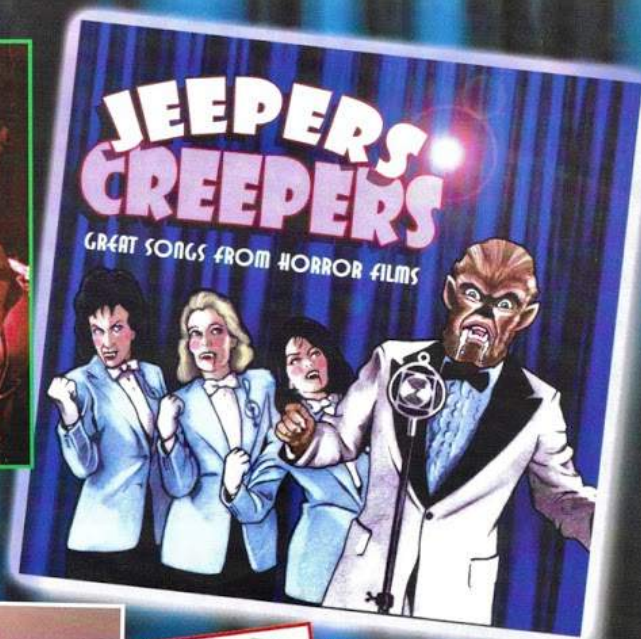
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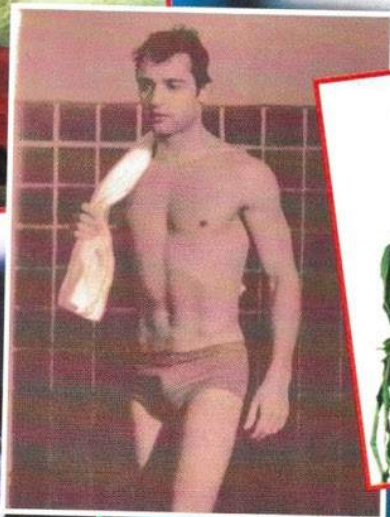
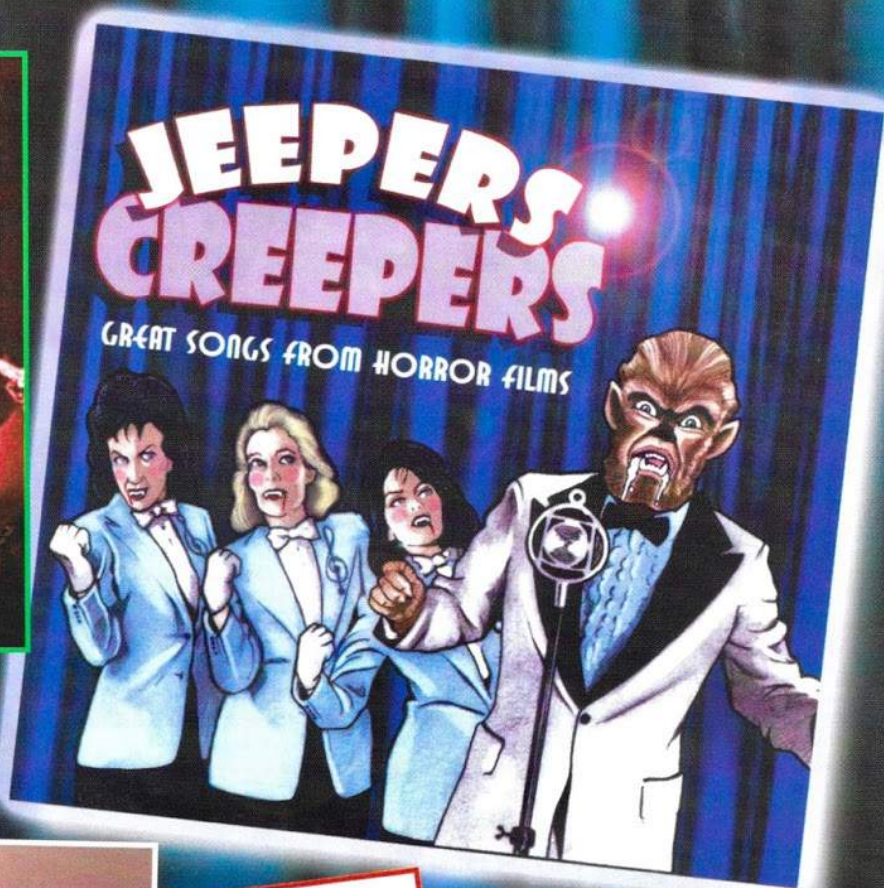
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the NEWS



HOUND

The Hound howls again from his favorite corner of the Street, offering feral facts fresh from the entertainment news wire. So wire you waiting? Read on...

Theatrical Thrills

Two groggy individuals awaken to find themselves in a small basement room, chained to a wall with a corpse lying between them. Is it NBC's latest reality series? No, it's the claustrophobic thriller *SAW*, due in theaters in September from Lion's Gate Films. The serial killer chiller, which debuted earlier this year at the Sundance Film Festival, stars Cary Elwes, Danny Glover, Monica Potter, and genre fave Shawnee (THE BLOB) Smith. Also debuting from Lion's Gate this fall is the horror actioner *ALONE IN THE DARK*, based on the popular Atari video game series. Christian Slater headlines as a supernatural investigator who's pursuing evil demons, ancient cults, apocalyptic curses—and a resuscitated film career. Tara Reid and Stephen Dorff costar. Rounding out Lion's Gate's fall slate is *GINGER SNAPS BACK: THE BEGINNING*, starring lycanthropic lovelies Katharine Isabelle and Emily Perkins in their third appearance in the popular Canadian scare series. In this time-twisted prequel, Ginger and Brigitte are in the Great White North of the 19th century, trudging through the tundra among the Native Americans and nasty-ass werewolves.

Still breaking records as we go to press is the *SPIDER MAN* sequel, formerly known as *THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN*, but rechristened *SPIDER-MAN 2*. (How original is that?) *SPIDEY 2* features the talents of Kristen Dunst as Mary Jane Watson, James Franco as Harry Osborn, Rosemary Harris as Aunt May Parker, Alfred Molina as Doctor Octopus, and, suiting up for the second time, Tobey Maguire as Peter Parker. (Maguire came close to being replaced.) Molina may also be seen on the Broadway stage as Tevye in a revival of *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF*. His onscreen wife is played by Donna Murphy, also brightening Broadway in a revival of *WONDERFUL TOWN*.

Déjà Views

A two-dimensional remake of Vincent Price's 3-D classic *HOUSE OF WAX* (1953) is this year's Halloween's release from the horror architects at Dark Castle Productions. Elisha Cuthbert (of *THE GIRL NEXT DOOR* and TV's *24*) and aspiring starlet Paris Hilton are lined up for extensive wax jobs in the Warner Bros. release, tentatively due in theaters on October 22. (With the latter star, it'll probably be a one-dimensional remake!)

Looking ahead to next year's attack of sequelitis: watch for summer releases *BATMAN BEGINS* from Warner Bros. and *STAR WARS: EPISODE 3* from 20th Century Fox, and the fall 2005 WB feature *HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE*. (There's also talk of a great big Batmusical on Broadway—which, of course, would be called *BATMAN BEGINS THE BEGUINE*.)

Boob Tube Tidings

Despite a prodigious 11th-hour lobbying effort by fans, the popular vampire adventure series *ANGEL* was cancelled by the WB network after a five-season run. The *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* spinoff starred David Boreanaz, who'll spend some of his newfound free time



SPIDER-MAN 2 (with Tobey Maguire as Spidey) has drawn millions of dollars into its web over the summer.

on stage in London, starring in the very non-demonic West End adaptation of *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY*. Another *BUFFY* alumnus, Eliza Dushku, will return for a second season of the Fox network's nifty fantasy drama *TRU CALLING*. Also returning with fresh episodes are *CHARMED* and *SMALLVILLE* on the WB, *THE DEAD ZONE* and *MONK* on the USA Network, and *CSI* and *CSI: MIAMI* on CBS, joined by a franchise member *CSI: NEW YORK*.

Production alums from *BUFFY* and *TRU CALLING* have a pilot in the works for a possible mid-season spot on Fox entitled *POINT PLEASANT*. Described by the network as a cross between *PEYTON PLACE* and *THE OMEN*, the proposed series stars former child actor Elisabeth Harnois (*MY DATE WITH THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER*) as a young woman who shakes up the titular New Jersey beach community when she mysteriously washes up on the shore. Odd personal hygiene habits aside, the 17-year-old girl's miraculous survival of a horrible boating accident starts the lo-

cals wondering if she hasn't got some weird Bruce Willis *UNBREAKABLE*-like powers. Sam Page, veteran of ABC's dramedy *AMERICAN DREAMS* and David DeCoteau's scream-king epics, plays the hunky lifeguard who rescues Harnois from the briny Jersey deep.

In a continuing effort to drive a stake through all vampire-related projects, the WB network has decided against reviving *DARK SHADOWS* as a weekly series. The network financed a pilot episode, which was coproduced by John Wells (ER) and original creator Dan Curtis (*THE NIGHT STALKER*, *TRILOGY OF TERROR*). Starring were Alec Newman (of Sci-Fi Channel's *DUNE*) as Barnabas Collins and X2's Kelly Hu as Dr. Julia Hoffman. No word whether this pilot will show up as a stand-alone TV movie.

Here's a short list of proposed TV series with pilots in production: *THE ROBINSONS: LOST IN SPACE*, coproduced for the WB by *BUFFY*'s Doug Petrie and action master John Woo... the USA Network's *FRANKENSTEIN* from powerhouse producers Martin Scorsese and Dean Koontz... *SILVER LAKE* (UPN), with *DAWSON'S CREEK*'s Kerr Smith as a psychic record-store proprietor... and *NIKKI AND NORA* (also UPN), starring Liz Vassey and Christina Cox as a pair of lesbian private detectives in New Orleans. No guarantee, of course, that any of these projects will see the light of the cathode ray.

We Haven't Lost Our Marples

Agatha Christie's geriatric crime-solver Miss Jane Marple is headed for the small screen once again. Seventy-two-year-old veteran character actress Geraldine McEwan (*MAPP AND LUCIA*) stars as the deceptively shrewd amateur sleuth in an initial series of four classic Christie adaptations: *THE BODY IN THE LIBRARY*, *A MURDER IS ANNOUNCED*, *MURDER AT THE VICARAGE*, and *THE 4.50 FROM PADDINGTON*. Joining McEwan is Joanna Lumley, cast as Miss Marple's eccentric pal Dolly Bantry. Also featured in the first installment are Ian Richardson, Simon Callow, and Jack Davenport. The new series is coproduced by UK's Granada and Boston's WGBH, which means it will very likely end up Stateside on the PBS series *MYSTERY!*

The Home Video Vault

The legendary Ape Man swings from the trees and into your DVD player with Warner Home Video's momentous box set

Continued on page 20



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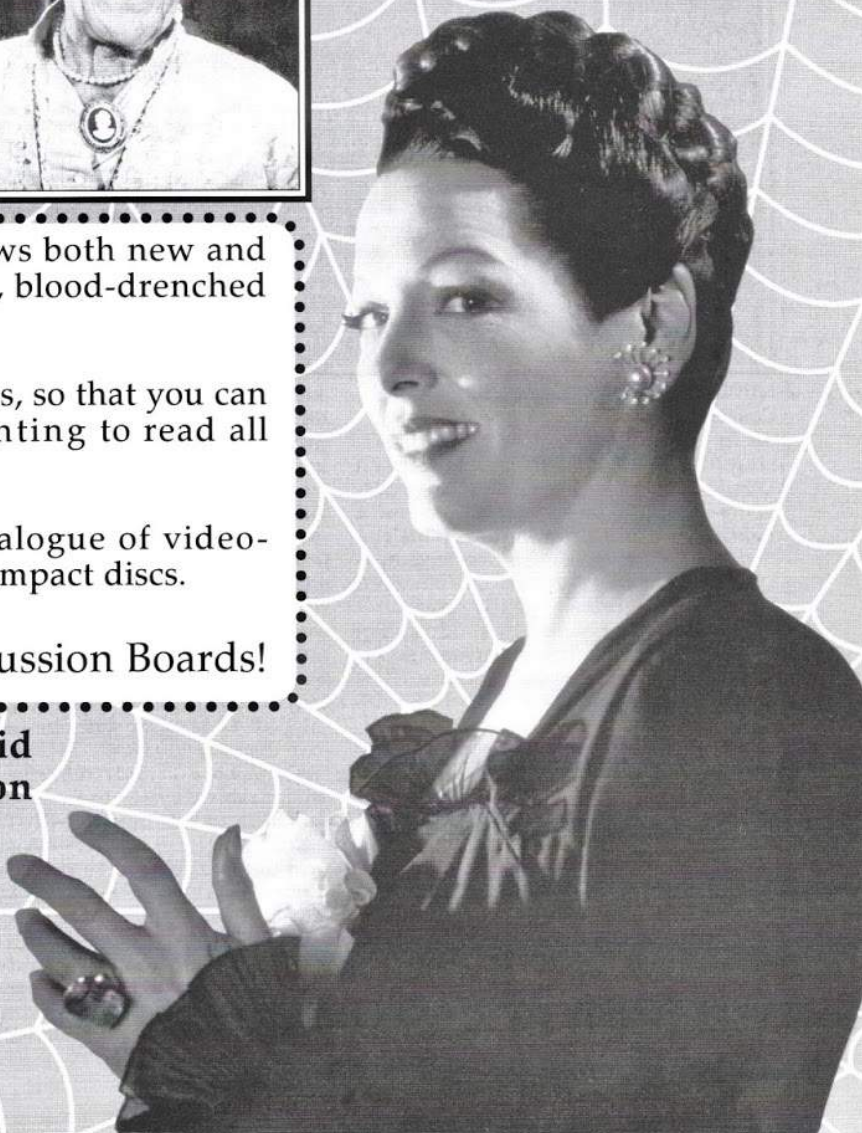
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Deeply Twisted

by Drew Sullivan

Never break the law of the woods! That warning comes not from good ol' Smokey the Bear, but from TwistedSpine.com Films, the twisted filmmakers behind the direct-to-home-video thrillers *THE DEEP DARK WOODS* (2003) and its sequel, *THE DEEP DARK WOODS 2... NO WITNESSES*.

The Cleveland Ohio company needed all of one day to make its initial effort. (Roger Corman has demanded a recount!) The story concerned a group of friends spending a weekend together in the woods (which are deep and dark). Unfortunately for this fun crowd, there's a deeply, darkly demented park ranger (Mike Perzel) on hand to make sure the slasher quota is met. *THE DEEP DARK WOODS* had everything lovers of genre required—blood, gore, and a gratuitous lesbian love scene—and proved immediately popular with horror fans online and at conventions. Naturally, a sequel (and more victims, such as Steven Thornton, pictured **TOP RIGHT**) had to follow.

In *THE DEEP DARK WOODS 2... NO WITNESSES*, the sole survivor of the previous outing is naturally suspected of killing all the victims. Dr. Owen Means (Gregory J. Lavelle), appointed by the court to determine whether the survivor is mentally competent to stand trial, believes his patient innocent and sets out to find proof—in the Deep Dark Woods.

TwistedSpine.com President (and director) Richard Yarber is proud of the company's success. "There definitely is a place in the film market for our product. Our films hinge on the idea that customers want entertainment first and foremost beyond anything else. Pioneers like David 'The Rock' Nelson have already blazed the trail for these films. We are just fine tuning what he and others have already done."

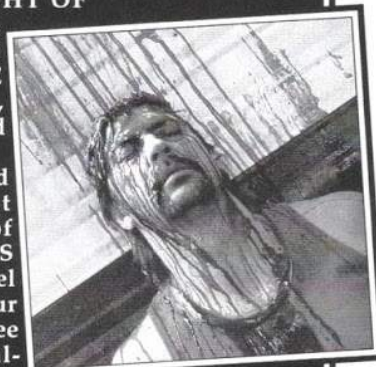
Jared Monsman (pictured **BOTTOM RIGHT**) signed on as a makeup artist and soon found playing private investigator Dobbins in *NO WITNESSES* and hanging around nude while waiting to film a death scene

that—unfortunately—was dropped. (Not everyone loves gratuitous lesbian love scenes, Twisted Spine!)

Monsman (a student in his fourth year at Kent State University) is hard at work on the script for Twisted Spine's next project—a film called *ZOMBIE KEGGER*. The budding special effects artist describes *ZOMBIE KEGGER* as a mix of *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* (1968), *DAWN OF THE DEAD* (1978), *RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD* (1985), *SCANNERS* (1981)—and *ANIMAL HOUSE* (1978).

"I met the Twisted Spine Crew for the first time during the filming of *THE DEEP DARK WOODS* back in 2001," recalls Michael Perzel. "Halfway through our shoot on day one, I could see the desire and professionalism within each and every one of them. Over the years, I've grown to respect them, not only for their commitment, but for their ability to put so much time, effort, and money into their work. I look forward to our meetings and any ideas or comments that these guys may have. These people love to make movies—and it shows."

At www.twistedspine.com, you'll find VHS and DVD copies of the company's films, plus posters, hats, teddy bears, T-shirts—and, uh, thongs....



NEWS HOUND

Continued from page 18

of all six MGM Tarzan features starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan. A bonus disc contains trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, and a new 90-minute documentary on the making of the series. The collection is available now for under \$60.00. (No word on an official release of the later RKO Tarzan titles, last owned by producer Sol Lesser and badly in need of restoration.)

Snap up the new and notable DVD box sets from Universal: *THE BEST OF BUD ABBOTT AND LOU COSTELLO, VOLUME 3* (\$26.98) includes some scary encounters for the comic duo when they meet FRANKENSTEIN, THE INVISIBLE MAN, and THE KILLER, BORIS KARLOFF... *THE DEANNA DURBIN SWEETHEART PACK* (\$26.98), contains six Durbin vehicles, including the sparkling comedy/mystery *LADY ON A TRAIN*... *THE ADVENTURES OF FRANCIS, THE TALKING MULE, VOLUME 1* (\$19.95) presents the first four comedies in the 1949-1956 series starring Donald O'Connor and his loqua-

cious equine pal... Fall brings Universal Monster Legacy set featuring *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*, *The Mummy*, and *The Invisible Man*.

BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES, VOLUME ONE (Warner Home Video, \$49.98) offers the first 28 episodes of this exceptional show on four discs, and includes a retrospective featurette, promotional pilot footage, and producer commentaries on selected segments. Also available from Warners is the first season of the nostalgically low-tech 1978 animated series *CHALLENGE OF THE SUPER FRIENDS*, with 16 episodes on two discs for \$29.98.

Columbia TriStar returns us to the memorable days of truly terrible fifties horror and sci-fi epics with *THE LOST SKELETON OF CADAVRA* (\$24.96), a low-budget feature that got a limited theatrical release last year. This black-and-white production lovingly recreates the enjoyably cheesy performances, background music, sets, and monsters of the era. The Bronson Canyon locations will be recognizable from viewings of *ROBOT MONSTER*, *THE RETURN OF*

DRACULA, and countless other genre movies and TV shows.

MGM plans a September DVD debut for its David Lean Collection, an eight-title package comprised of UK classics *IN WHICH WE SERVE*, *THIS HAPPY BREED*, *BLITHE SPIRIT*, *BRIEF ENCOUNTER*, *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*, *OLIVER TWIST*, *THE PASSIONATE FRIENDS*, and *MADEIRA*.

September also brings Paramount's special two-disc edition of its baton-passing Enterprise epic, *STAR TREK: GENERATIONS*.

Disney's Summer of Syn

Sing along with *The Hound*: "Scarecrow, Scarecrow!" Walt Disney's baby boomer favorite *DR. SYN, ALIAS THE SCARECROW* (serialized on television in 1964 as *THE SCARECROW OF ROMNEY MARSH*) makes its DVD debut this summer, along with a sackload of vintage live-action Vault Disney favorites. Patrick McGeehan stars as an 18th-century English vicar who aids his poor parishioners by adopting a nocturnal alter ego, *The Scarecrow*—a Halloweenish

Robin Hood who's the leader of a band of smugglers. Taken from Russell Thorndike's Dr. Syn novels (previously adapted in 1937 as DR SYN starring George Arliss and in 1962 for the Hammer Films thriller NIGHT CREATURES, starring Peter Cushing), this memorable adventure drama has remained one of Disney's most popular and most requested titles. (For more scary Scarecrow info, visit SYN aficionado Tom Hering's website at <http://users.msworldnet.com/tomhering/> for lots of nostalgic fun and facts.)

Across the Irish Sea—and brand new on DVD—is Disney's classic fantasy DABBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE, starring Albert Sharpe, Janet Munro, and a tuneful young Sean Connery. The sentimental Scottish tale GREY-FRIARS BOBBY also debuts on disc, featuring Donald Crisp, Laurence Naismith, and the title terrier. Patrick McGeehan reappears in Disney's fine feline fantasy THE THREE LIVES OF THOMASINA, costarring Susan Hampshire and pre-POPPINS moppets Karen Dotrice and Matthew Garber. Other live-action favorites new to DVD from the Mouse House include the benignly beastly features THE SHAGGY DOG (starring *Scarlet Street* fave Tommy Kirk), THE UGLY DACHSHUND, and CHARLIE THE LONESOME COUGAR, plus the latter-day Disney scarefests THE WATCHER IN THE WOODS and SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES. All these titles are expected to retail for \$19.99 each.

Diabolical DVDs

Warner Home Video provides horror fans with a late summer night's scream via a quintet of August DVD debuts. A special edition of Tod Browning's still-controversial FREAKS (1932), remastered from nitrate film elements, features three alternate endings and an audio commentary by Browning scholar and *Scarlet Street* contributor David J. Skal. The little-girl-gone-wild drama THE BAD SEED includes optional narration by star Patty McCormack and famed cross-dressing actor/playwright Charles Busch (PSYCHO BEACH PARTY). Horror-hag favorite DEAD RINGER, starring tandem Bette Davis, also receives a commentary from Busch, along with *Scarlet Street* alum Boze Hadleigh, author of *Bette Davis Speaks* and *The Lavender Screen*. VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED and CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED are featured on a double-feature disc that includes commentaries by production personnel on both titles. FREAKS, SEED, and RINGER also include newly-produced documentary featurettes. Each disc is available for \$19.97.

MGM joins the August horror hootenanny with a twin-bill DVD of the original telefilms THE NIGHT STALKER and THE NIGHT STRANGLER. Darren McGavin makes his first appearances here in his signature role of reporter/monster-magnet Carl Kolchak. Producer Dan Curtis provides behind-the-scenes info in a pair of new interview featurettes

accompanying the titles. The disc has a list price of \$14.95.

Also in August, Warner Home Video offers a two-disc special edition of THE LOST BOYS, director Joel Schumacher's blood-sucker favorite that is perhaps a precursor to today's boy-vampire B-movies from Rapid Heart and Dead Guys Cinema. The BOYS package (\$26.99) features production documentaries, deleted scenes, and an audio commentary by Schumacher and the costarring Corveys (Feldman and Haim).

Home vid availability and release dates are forever in flux, so consult your local retailers for the most current info.

The Wicked Stage

The first new musical to put the bite on Broadway's 2004 season is DRACULA, THE MUSICAL from Tony-nominated composer Frank Wildhorn (JEKYLL & HYDE, THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL). Tom Hewitt, the Rialto's recent Frank N. Furter in THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW revival, portrays the title Count. Melissa Errico (MY FAIR LADY, AMOUR) costars as Mina, Don Stephenson plays Renfield, and Stephen McKinley Henderson is Professor Van Helsing. Tony winners Christopher Hampton and Don Black (both veterans of SUNSET BLVD.) provide the book and lyrics, respectively. The elaborate production—which includes extensive wire work to keep its carnivorous cast airborne—opens for previews at the Belasco Theatre on July 12, with opening night scheduled for August 5. For updates, visit Mr. Wildhorn's website at <http://www.frankwildhorn.com/projects/dracula/>.

Rats! What a drag that we *Scarlet* denizens missed seeing Baby Jane Hudson and sister Blanche resurrected on stage in the Chicago regional theater production HOW "WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE" HAPPENED. This waggish, fanciful version of the making of the Robert Aldrich film (see *Scarlet Street* #49 for a slightly more straight-faced accounting) was presented by Hell In a Handbag Productions in May and June at Theater Building Chicago. Playwright David Cerda portrayed Miss Joan Crawford, and the play's executive producer Steve Hickson took the stage as Miss Bette Davis. More information about the produc-



Between the years 1932 and 1942, MGM produced six classic jungle epics based on the Tarzan novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Stars Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan (Jane) were joined by Johnny Sheffield (Boy) in TARZAN FINDS A SON (1939). All six adventures are now available on DVD

tion (and a great souvenir T-shirt) is available at the company's website: www.handbagproductions.org.

Gone, but never to be forgotten: writer/director/actor Sir Peter Ustinov; pulp writer Hugh B. Cave; author and broadcaster Alistair Cooke; choreographer June Taylor; wrestler Ray "Hercules" Hernandez; actor/comedian Alan King; radio personalities J. J. Jackson and Gene Klavan; TV announcer Gene Wood; guitar pioneers Barney Kessel and Alvin Rey; singers Jan Berry (of Jan & Dean), Don Cornell, Doris Troy, and Ray Charles; singer/actors Carl Anderson, Harry Babbitt, and Virginia Capers; composer Marius Constant; visual effects artist Don Trumbull; art director Robert A. Burns; children's TV scripter Katherine Lawrence; producers Dana Broccoli and Mary-Ellis Bunim; screenwriters Nelson Gidding, John Vlahos, and Robert Lees; director Bernard McEveety; writer/performer Spaulding Gray; and actors Harry Bartell, Richard Biggs, Judy Campbell, Victor Cowie, Sheila Darcy, Frances Dee, Walt Gorney, Russell Hunter, Gilbert "Zulu" Kauhi, Lincoln Kilpatrick, Anna Lee, Mercedes McCambridge, Jan Miner, Robert Pastorelli, Albert Paulsen, John Randolph, Ronald Reagan, Patricia Russell, Jan Sterling, Barbara Whiting, Paul Winfield, Helene Winston, Doris Dowling, Frank Nastasi, Marlon Brando, and Dr. Lao himself, Tony Randall. 🐾

Send The Hound your questions, comments and compliments via email to TheNewsHound@scarletstreet.com.

SCREEN...



and Screen AGAIN!



Scarlet Street's DVD Reviews

DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE
TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA
FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED
 Warner Home Video—\$19.99 each

Warner Home Video has unleashed three more highly anticipated Hammer horror classics from its vaults. Hammer's die-hard fans should be pleased with the entire trio.

DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE (1968) clings tightly to the established Hammer Dracula formula, offering little new in terms of story. Yet, the film rises above most entries in the long-running series by executing its tried-and-true formula with uncommon artistry. This is Freddie Francis' finest directorial outing. He packs the picture with the kind of lovely compositions and bold use of color one expects from an Oscar-winning cinematographer. The plot moves along well, avoiding the dull stretches that afflicted some later Hammer chillers. Christopher Lee's Count Dracula is given a bit more to do than in other series entries. Lee is

paired with a worthy supporting cast, including Veronica Carlson (making her Hammer debut), Barry Andrews, Rupert Davies, and Michael Ripper.

DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE was followed by **TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA** (1970), which deserves credit for breaking the mold and leading the series in a new direction. Its story revolves around a circle of debauched Englishmen (Geoffrey Kean, John Carson, and Peter Sallis) who dabble in Satanism while maintaining a facade of proper Victorian propriety. Their efforts lead them to fund an ungodly ritual (check the film's title) performed by the corrupt Lord Courtley (Ralph Bates), which results in Courtley's gruesome death and the resurrection of you-know-whom (again, played by Christopher Lee).

The supporting cast includes Gwen Watford (later a memorable Dolly Banttry to Joan Hickson's Miss Jane Marple), Roy Kinnear, and the inevitable (and welcome) Michael Ripper. The attractive young lovers are played by Linda Hayden and Anthony Corlan (Emil in 1972's **VAMPIRE CIRCUS**). James Bernard's lush score was one of his personal favorites. The DVD at last restores footage missing from the stateside release of **TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA**, including a titillating snake dance at an orgy attended by the three Victorian hypocrites and several shots of the titular bloodsucker.

Also from Warners comes **FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED** (1969), one of the crown jewels of Hammer's filmography. Its fine, tightly wound story has Bar-

on Frankenstein (Peter Cushing, in one of his finest performances) blackmailing a young doctor (Simon Ward) and his fiancée (Veronica Carlson again) into helping him carry out a daring brain transplant. Things, of course, go awry. Some fans carp about this film's lack of a "real" monster, but those complaints miss the whole point—which is that Frankenstein has himself become a monster and, well, must be destroyed!

The DVD source print is complete, including the notorious rape scene, which was cut from the film's initial stateside release. This scene is absolutely essential to the narrative (notwithstanding Cushing and Carlson's objections to performing it), since it demonstrates how truly monstrous the Baron has become. **FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED**, which rivals **THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN** (1958) as the best of Hammer's Frankenflicks, features several other stand-out scenes, including a very Hitchcockian sequence in which a water main break threatens to reveal a concealed body. Cushing's chilling, remorseless performance is a marvel unto itself. This also ranks among director Terence Fisher's finest efforts.

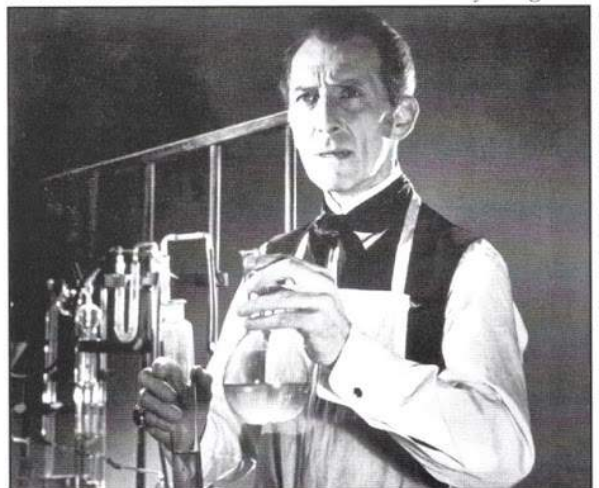
Warner Bros. offers the films in letter-perfect, widescreen transfers from pristine prints. The colors are vibrant, the blacks firm, and the mono sound is clear. More important, for collectors, is the fact that all the prints are complete and uncut. The only bonus materials included are the respective theatrical trailers. Still, with prints like these and at prices this low, who cares?

—Mark Clark

YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES
 Paramount Home Video—\$19.99

Before there was a Hogwarts, there was an Etonesque boarding school; before Harry Potter, there was—in 1985—**YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES**. Ah, yes! The game was afoot when a pre-Harry Potter Chris Columbus scripted a non-canonical entry in the life of young sleuth Holmes (Nicholas Rowe) and his first case with the equally young John Watson (Alex Cox). Contradicting what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle told us about Holmes and Watson's first meeting in *A Study in Scarlet* (published in 1887), **YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES'** protagonists "meet cute" at school before tackling the dark mystery of the pyramid of fear. (The cute meeting actually pays homage to Doyle's own confusion over Watson's first name: Holmes incorrectly hazards a guess that the "J" stands for James; Watson's own wife also calls him James in the 1891 short story "The Man With the Twisted Lip").

A cloaked, hooded figure prowls the streets of Victorian London, shooting hallucinogen-tinged thorns at unsuspecting middle-aged men, who promptly experience horrific, often humorting, visions and deaths. The pretitile sequence showcasing the last minutes



of Bentley Bobster (Patrick Newell) seems to have flown out of ERASERHEAD (1978), while other visions involve frolicking French pastries and a stained-glass window's knight in shining armor—the first completely computer-generated character in film.

Even if the film's pyramid of death would be more at home in an Indiana Jones adventure, the story is fun. Under the direction of Barry Levinson, the young sleuths encounter erstwhile mainstays of Conan Doyle's imagination: Inspector Lestrade (Roger Ashton-Griffiths); the deerstalker; the magnifying glass; the pipe; and—in a post-credits stinger, the Napoleon of Crime himself. It's all a smashing piece of entertainment, from the production's sumptuous design to Bruce Broughton's underappreciated, remarkable score. Rowe and Cox work well together and look enough like young versions of the silver screen's greatest Holmes and Watson—Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. Major mention should be made of the remarkable character developed by fan favorite Anthony Higgins, formerly known as Hammer Horror hunk An-



thony Corlan. His Rath is a cunning villain, equally adept at mind games, buckling the swash, and shooting to kill. (Only a few years later, Higgins would portray Holmes himself in the 1993 TV movie SHERLOCK HOLMES RETURNS.) Other cast members with Sherlockian pedigrees include Nigel Stock (Watson opposite Douglas Wilmer and Peter Cushing on British TV), Freddie Jones (Inspector Baynes opposite Jeremy Brett's Holmes for Granada TV), and the aforementioned Newell (Blessington opposite Brett, and Lestrade in Sheldon Reynolds' 1982 series SHERLOCK HOLMES AND DOCTOR WATSON).

Though lacking special features, Paramount's DVD presentation of the 1985 film is top notch.

—Anthony Dale

HORROR OF DRACULA

Warner Home Video—\$19.98

HORROR OF DRACULA (1958), the first and best of Hammer's legendary vampire series, is available to a new audience on DVD. The print is marvelous, and the sound dropout that marred James Bernard's thunderous title theme has been repaired. We finally have the film on a sturdy, easy-to-store disc instead of a bulky videotape. While the painted artwork on the videocassette was splendid, the DVD replaces that cover art with a striking



detail from the Italian one-sheet, showing a very Byronesque Christopher Lee carrying off a nightgowned victim.

Yet these pluses are outweighed by the DVD's many minuses. Instead of going with a letterboxed print, Warner Bros. presents HORROR OF DRACULA fullscreen, so that in many shots the tops of heads are cut off. There are almost no extras. Sure, we get a theatrical trailer, 26 chapter stops, and four choices of subtitles (including Portuguese!), but that's it. There are no cast and crew biographies or filmographies, only a single screen listing the principal actors, screenwriter, and director. There are no photo galleries, and no commentaries whatsoever. Of course, Peter Cushing and Terence Fisher are gone, but Christopher Lee is still around, and so are costar Michael Gough and screenwriter Jimmy Sangster. Rumor has it that Lee was more than willing to do a commentary, but Warner Bros. didn't want to pay him. Considering Lee's current high profile thanks to the STAR WARS and THE LORD OF THE RINGS films, such stinginess—if accurate—is a terrible insult to the actor.

Overall, the DVD presentation is a flop. It's ironic that lesser titles in the series—such as SCARS OF DRACULA (1970)—have been given the sort of treatment usually reserved for the likes of CITIZEN KANE (1941), while the first and best is treated like dirt. (Anchor Bay didn't mind springing for Lee's insightful commentary on SCARS and others discs, by the way.) Here's hoping irate Hammer fans will descend on Warner Home Video and demand proper treatment for this horror classic in time for the film's 50th anniversary.

—Jonathan Malcolm Lampley

RETURN TO NEVER LAND

Walt Disney Home Video—\$29.99

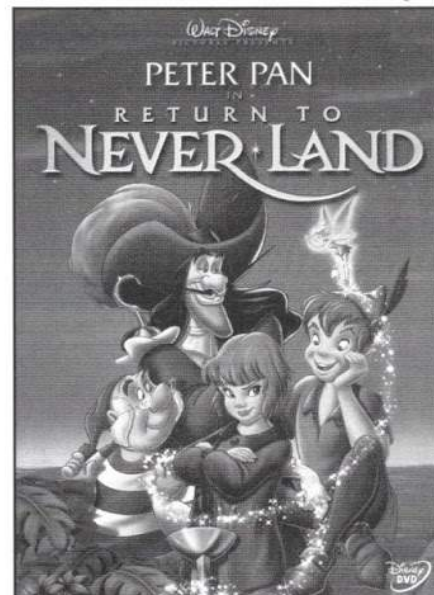
The Disney Corporation has always treated PETER PAN (1953) rather carelessly. After putting out a 45th Anniversary VHS, the company ignored the title's 50th Anniversary and Peter Pan's centenary and brought out the DVD version offhandedly. Now we get a sequel, RETURN TO NEVER LAND (2002), and while it has things to recommend it, it's slight and hardly a patch on its past inspirations.

NEVER LAND begins with a shadow play, this one among the clouds, that recalls the silhouettes and voices of the original Disney version. This faithful-

ness proves to be one of the sequel's greatest strengths. As we pass from the retelling of Wendy's story we come upon the Darling house in wartime London's Bloomsbury. It's the same house we've seen before, and indeed the Disney artists have followed the architecture and coloring of the original film, which utilized the wonderful colorist Mary Blair. Even the wallpaper is the same.

Unfortunately, after a wonderful opening sequence wherein Wendy's daughter Jane is kidnapped by Captain Hook and carried aboard a beautifully rendered pirate ship, it's a long haul before we get another sequence as successful. Not until the final scene do we get depth, character, and a moment of poignancy when Peter finally encounters the adult Wendy. The film concludes with the breathtaking flying sequence we have been so long denied. Peter's final return to Never Land captures the exhilaration of the original film's thrilling flight over London. Alas, it is not only the last moment of the film, but it is annoyingly interrupted by the jarring intrusion of John Sebastian's song "Do You Believe in Magic?" Not a good choice.

The lack of good songs hurts this film the most. After a bland recycling of "The Second Star to the Right," written by the great Sammys (Fain and Cahn), there is precious little music. While the underscoring by Joel McNeely is serviceable, the songs are dreadful. A whiny "I'll Try," done as a voiceover by an oddly Nashville-sounding Jonathan Brooke, and the totally forgettable "So to Be One of Us" sung by Peter and the Lost Boys fall far short of the mark. This is sad, since Peter had no song in



the first film; to finally give him one and have him lost in the melee is particularly disappointing.

Other disappointments include the oddly missing Indian tribe (the village is

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The Triumphant Return of CHARLIE CHAN

THE CHARLIE CHAN CHANTHOLOGY

MGM Home Entertainment—\$69.96

While 20th Century Fox continues to sit on its collective corporate hands and refuse to broadcast, release on DVD, or license to anyone its impressive collection of Charlie Chan films (1931-1942), MGM has had the good sense to bring out its Charlie Chan holdings—or at least part of them. That Fox's Chan holdings are the generally less desirable films produced by the Poverty Row studio Monogram Pictures—not to mention the fact that they took the easy way out and picked the same six titles (1944's *CHARLIE CHAN IN THE SECRET SERVICE*, 1944's *CHARLIE CHAN IN THE CHINESE CAT*, 1944's *CHARLIE CHAN IN BLACK MAGIC*, 1945's *THE JADE MASK*, 1945's *THE SCARLET CLUE*, and 1945's *THE SHANGHAI COBRA*) that were earlier released on laser-disc—shouldn't deter fans of the series.

From a purely practical standpoint, Chan fans will want to support this release simply because the chances of MGM bringing out the rest of its library—not to mention shaking Fox out of its complacency—are greatly increased if this first set does well. Happily, the set—while not comprising the best of the Monogram series—is

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of Chan will want on its own merits. There's something to be said, too, for bringing the series out in order of production. Not only does this present the films in the correct sequence, allowing the viewer to get a sense of the development of the series, but it bodes well for the release of all the titles, instead of merely someone's notion of what makes up the most desirable titles—a wholly subjective call. (Somewhere, someone actually likes 1946's *DANGEROUS MONEY*!)

Better yet, the titles in question—known to most fans from 16mm TV prints and multi-generation VHS dubs from those battered, splicy prints—look wonderful. Contrast is excellent. The image is sharp. Scratches and speckling are at a bare minimum, while the soundtracks have been cleaned up (no mean feat on some of these titles) and are largely free of hiss and pops. Short of using a time machine and seeing these films on their original release, it's unlikely you'll ever see them looking or sounding any better than they do here.

As for the films themselves, they're something of a mixed bag, though only one of them—*CHARLIE CHAN IN THE SECRET SERVICE*—could actually be called a lesser entry. However, since it's the first in the Monogram series and sets the tone and the basic premise (Charlie doing his wartime bit by working for the government rather than the Honolulu Police Department), as well as introducing Mantan Moreland's Birmingham Brown, its inclusion is absolutely essential.

When producers Philip N. Krasne and James S. Burkett—along with Sidney Toler, who had wisely bought the rights to the character—decided to revive the series two years after 20th Century Fox dropped it, they realized that the approach would have to be less ambitious than that of the Fox films. The Fox titles had been budgeted at \$200,000 a picture. The best Monogram could offer was a paltry \$75,000. The situation was further compromised by having far less in terms of standing sets and other resources at Monogram than at Fox. As a result, the new films would have to largely eschew exotic locales. (When they didn't—as in 1946's *THE RED DRAGON* and *DANGEROUS MONEY*—the threadbare nature of the productions really showed.) Instead, Charlie would become more of a drawing-room detective, limiting his investigations to old dark houses, office buildings, and other such easily achieved generic settings. To accomplish this, they brought in a

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SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 23

flown through with nary an "injun," as little Michael would say, in sight), the mermaids (used only as a bit of scenery), the crocodile (a wonderful character ineptly replaced with an octopus), and Peter's pipes. There are a few gags, but all need development, most of them familiar retreads of incidents from the earlier production. (There is a nice duel for Peter and Hook.) All in all, *RETURN TO NEVER LAND* is a missed opportunity—not an embarrassment, but hardly a treasure that will last.

The voices are well matched to the originals, particularly Blayne Weaver as Peter and Corey Burton as Captain Hook. The DVD extras include a few deleted scenes, some still in pencil. The disc is THX-certified, in Dolby Digital 5.1 and "family friendly Widescreen," with tracks in English, French, and Spanish.

—Farnham Scott

STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING

Anchor Bay Entertainment—\$19.95

STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING (1972) is an atypical Hammer picture. None of its major stars or monsters are in sight, and the setting is contemporary. It's also unrelentingly grim and ugly. If Hammer had made *LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR* (1977), it'd look an awful lot like this movie.

The main character, Brenda (Rita Tushingham), a frumpy, socially inept misfit, tells her mum she's preggers just to get out of the house and into swingin' London. Once there, she becomes involved with a young man named Clive (Shane Briant), an attractive, if androgynous, gigolo. Because the title references *PETER PAN*, Clive refers to himself as Peter and his worshipful devotee as Wendy. Since this is a Hammer movie, after all, Clive is also a serial murderer, with an abhorrence for physically beautiful women.

The film sports almost no redeeming features. With a few exceptions, the cast is as unattractive as its storyline; though the male and female leads are well cast and acquit themselves admirably, it's difficult to actually care about them, since their characters are both essentially unlikable. Jazz singer Annie Ross is wasted in a bit part, but she does sing a good title theme song. There's a bit of unintentional comedy when Brenda pretties herself up for her beloved, and, after all the effort, leaves the beauty shop looking for all the world like one of the Kids in the Hall in drag!

Anchor Bay has given this movie a better treatment on DVD than it deserves, with a flawless widescreen transfer, clean stereo sound, a commentary track, a trailer, and a text biography of director Peter Collinson. If a small company can give such a minor Hammer entry a decent presentation, why can't a major outfit like Warner Bros. go the extra mile?

—Robin Anderson





WITHOUT A CLUE

MGM Home Entertainment—\$14.95

Difficult thing to achieve, a successful Sherlock Holmes spoof. Gene Wilder missed the mark with *THE ADVENTURE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES' SMARTER BROTHER* (1975), and Paul Morrissey's *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* (1978) was an unfunny mess starring first-rate British comics who should have known better. Billy Wilder's *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES* (1970) was less spoof than a loving homage splendidly realized, its comic exaggerations not too far removed from the "true facts" of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original stories.



Then there's *WITHOUT A CLUE* (1988), written by Gary Murphy and Larry Strawther, and directed by Thom Eberhardt—none of them names on a par with Wilder, Morrissey, and Wilder (though Murphy and Strawther have gone on to script *MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE*). Yet they succeeded where others failed, and *CLUE* is a wholly

successful Sherlock Holmes spoof, setting the canon spinning and wickedly—albeit lovingly—subverting the Sherlockian world as we know it.

Dr. John H. Watson (Ben Kingsley) is the World's Greatest Detective, but nobody has a clue to that well-hidden fact. In order to have a free hand, Watson has invented the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes, written up his own adventures with Holmes the hero and himself merely the faithful companion, and hired an unemployed, addlepated, frequently besotted actor named Reginald Kincaid (Michael Caine) to don the famous deerstalker. Watson's secret is known only to Kincaid, Mrs. Hudson (Pat Keen), Wiggins (Matthew Savage), and a certain criminal genius who isn't easily gulled—Professor James Moriarty (Paul Freeman).

Frustrated by Kincaid's stunning lack of intellect, Watson fires him and tries to reinvent himself as the Crime Doctor, but the publisher of the *Strand Magazine*, Norman Greenhough (Peter Cook, who was Holmes in Morrissey's *HOUND*), wants only Sherlock Holmes stories. Scotland Yard, in the person of Inspector Lestrade (Jeffrey Jones), refuses to take the Crime Doctor seriously. When a new case involving the Bank of England plates presents itself (shades of 1946's *DRESSED TO KILL*), there's nothing left to do but rehire Kincaid and try to foil Moriarty's dastardly scheme.

Caine and Kingsley are an inspired team and make every moment count. The supporting cast—which includes Lysette Anthony as a damsel in distress, Matthew Sim as a non-damsel in distress, and Nigel Davenport as Lord Smithwick—couldn't be bettered. Alas, the MGM Home Entertainment DVD release is a disappointment. The sole extra is a trailer. Far worse, the film is available only in a full screen presentation. Still, it's better than not having this delightful film at all. Where else will you find "Sherlock" revealing the "true identity" of the Napoleon of Crime—"I've got it! His real name is Artie Morty!"

—Richard Valley

DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS

Blue Underground—\$19.95

Stefan and Valerie Chilton (John Karlen and Danielle Ouimet) check into a deserted hotel off-season in Ostend, Belgium on their honeymoon. Intending to stay only one night, they change their minds with the arrival of Countess Elizabeth Bathory (Delphine Seyrig) and her companion, Illona (Andrea Rau). Enraptured by the new guests, the newlyweds decide to stay despite the reservations of the aging concierge Pierre (Paul Esser). Pierre is certain he once met Bathory, looking exactly as she is presently, when he was a young man. The Countess is equally intrigued by the young couple and harbors sinister plans for them, potentially complicated by the arrival of a retired policeman (Georges Jamin) who is investi-

gating the bloodless corpses that seem to follow in the Countess' wake.

DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS (1971) is depraved enough to satisfy even the most jaded exploitation fan, yet elegant and literate enough for the art-house crowd. Harry Kümel's direction and screenplay (cowritten with Pierre Drouot, Jean Ferry and Jo Amiel) is leisurely paced and moody, punctuated with sudden moments of violence. Camera-man Eduard Van Der Enden's heavily gelled approach (with glorious fades to red) is perfectly complemented by François De Roubaix's haunting score. The acting is also very fine, but there is one element that ties everything together and lifts the film to classic status: Delphine Seyrig's performance. Decadent, ethereal, and glamorous, she is arguably the best—and most seductive—vampiress to grace the silver screen. Her first appearance reveals the influence of classic Hollywood's glamour queens



and her delivery of the dialogue is sublime. A performance not to be missed.

Blue Underground's DVD utilizes the same elements as the old Roan LD/Anchor Bay DVD, digitally tweaking the image for improved clarity and color saturation. There is room for improvement should better elements ever surface. This disc carries over the commentary with John Karlen and *Scarlet Street* scribe David Del Valle from the last release and adds a new one with Harry Kümel and moderator David Gregory, both tracks are worthwhile. BU also gives us a new interview with Andrea Rau, a theatrical trailer, radio spots, and a still gallery. Check it out and find out why, in the words of our dark Countess, "Love can be stronger than life, stronger even than death."

—Ron Morgan

NERO WOLFE (Season One)

A&E—\$69.95

A&E's mystery series *NERO WOLFE* was a rarity among television shows based on literary sources; it was actually as faithful as possible to the original material—Rex Stout's long-running series of novels and stories about the quarter-of-a-ton, food and orchid loving detective and his agile, wisecracking assistant, Archie Goodwin. *NERO WOLFE*



delivered an enjoyable mystery every week, acted with panache by Maury Chaykin as Wolfe, Timothy Hutton as Archie, and a large and able supporting cast as other series regular and guest characters. Unfortunately, A&E canceled NERO WOLFE after a mere two seasons, citing low ratings. As a consolation prize, the network has released a DVD box set of the show's complete first season.

NERO WOLFE on DVD got off to a rocky start with a defective initial pressing. Fans quickly recognized that many of the episodes had been mastered from edited versions cut down to allow for more commercial time during repeats. They had identified all the cuts, posted the list to the internet, and notified A&E of the problem. A&E rectified the error by pulling all the incorrectly mastered sets, repressing the DVDs, and offering to replace already-purchased copies. The new, correctly mastered sets have a "Collector's Edition" sticker on the plastic wrap, so check for the sticker before you purchase this set.

The new set is worth the wait. The episodes, which are all in full-frame mode with Dolby stereo sound, look and sound splendid. The transfer is sharp, with colors rich and jewel-like. You'll find yourself reveling in the gorgeous hues of Archie's and Nero's silk ties and matching pocket handkerchiefs, the buttery red and yellow leather of the chairs in Wolfe's office, the golden light cast by the lamps, and the scarlet lipstick adorning the lips of many of the women who arrive to ask for Wolfe's services and end up catching Archie's eye.

It's a good thing the episodes look so good, because that's all there is to enjoy. No truth in labeling here—despite the "Collector's Edition" sticker, there isn't anything collected in this box set besides the episodes themselves, plus bios and filmographies for Hutton and Chaykin. No commentaries, no interviews, no behind-the-scenes footage, no info about Rex Stout and his work. Nothing. Not even the MAKING OF NERO WOLFE special aired by A&E,

or THE GOLDEN SPIDERS, the two-hour movie that was meant to kick off a series of NERO WOLFE TV movies, but instead became the pilot to a weekly series because it drew such high ratings.

The episodes delight, but the lack of extras and THE GOLDEN SPIDERS is a tremendous frustration. Even so, this NERO WOLFE set is a required purchase for mystery lovers.

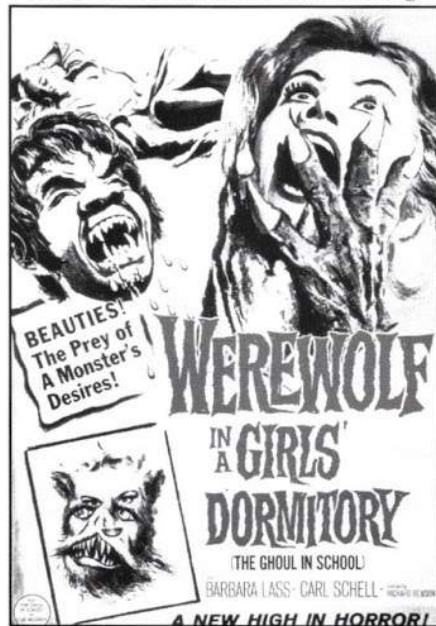
—Paula Vitaris

WEREWOLF IN A GIRLS' DORMITORY Retromedia/Image Entertainment \$14.98

Retromedia has gone the extra step for horror fans with WEREWOLF IN A GIRLS' DORMITORY (1962), previously available on public-domain labels.

Known as LYCANTHROPUS in several European markets, this Italian-made fright flick closely resembles a German krimi, with its stylish black-and-white photography and mystery element. Several residents in a girls' reform school (not a dormitory) are gruesomely murdered, and suspicion falls on several members of the international cast, including Luciano Pigozzi (the Italian Peter Lorre) as Walter the caretaker; French Maurice Marsac as Sir Alfred, the lover of one of the victims; and Germans Curt Lowens (as Swift, the head of the school) and Carl Schell (the real-life brother of Maximilian, as Dr. Julian Olcott, the school's new teacher).

The school, which occupies a brooding castle and surrounding grounds, has been set up for wayward girls (most of whom appear to be in their twenties). This gives the filmmakers an endless supply of pretty women as potential victims of the unseen attacker. Good girl



(in a reform school?) Priscilla (played by Roman Polanski's first wife, Barbara Lass) keeps finding various victims until she finally comes face to fuzzy face with the werewolf itself.

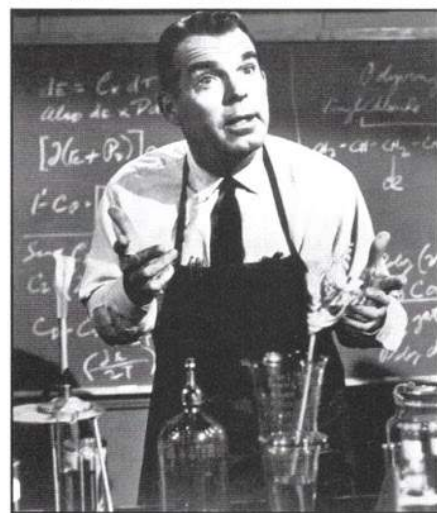
The song "The Ghoul in School," composed for the original American release of WEREWOLF (from MGM, yet!) is absent, but otherwise this DVD is the version of the movie to buy. Besides the superior print quality, this DVD also offers a recreation of the original movie giveaway; a still gallery; and, best of all, a thoroughly entertaining audio commentary with film historian and frequent *Scarlet Street* contributor David De Valle and star Curt Lowens. Del Valle enthusiastically reveals details about this film and Euro Horror in general. For his part, Lowens seems astonished that anyone cares about WEREWOLF IN A GIRLS' DORMITORY, but still appears genuinely proud of the picture.

—Kevin G. Shinnick

THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR SON OF FLUBBER

Walt Disney Home Video—\$19.99

One of 1961's top box office draws, Walt Disney's THE ABSENT-MINDED PRO-



FESSOR also earned three Academy Award nominations: one for Best Cinematography (Black and White), another for Best Art Direction/Set Direction (Black and White), and the third for Best Special Effects. Was it any wonder that Disney fans and film buffs threw Donald Duck-worthy tantrums when the studio absentmindedly released the film in a colorized, pan-and-scan DVD version early in 2003? (Disney had released a similar print on video in the 1980s and evidently just recycled it for the film's first DVD appearance.)

The colorized monstrosity saw a computer technician's pixilated mouse clicks replace Oscar-nominated art and set direction and cinematography orchestrated by accomplished Hollywood veterans. The movie, after all, gave art director Carroll Clark his sixth Oscar nomination in a career that included KING KONG (1933), THE ENCHANTED COTTAGE (1945), and NOTORIOUS (1946). For set decorator Emile Kuri, whose work had included IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (1946),

ROPE (1948), THE HEIRESS (1949), and SHANE (1953). The Disney film also marked his sixth Oscar nomination.

Placating film purists who appreciate seeing a film the way its creators intended, Disney eight months later offered a second DVD release of THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR. While this new widescreen, black-and-white version is a great print, it unfortunately offers nothing more than the first DVD's barebones version. Missing are featurettes revealing the formula concocted by studio technicians to create Flubber or the behind-the-scenes piano wires used to make Professor Ned Brainard's (Fred MacMurray's) Model-T car famously fly. Nor will you find interviews with cast members Nancy Olson

or Tommy Kirk, even though Disney included them on supplemental material for recent DVD releases of OLD YELLER (1957) and POLLYANNA (1960).

Overlooking the lack of bonus programming, THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR remains a fun foray into early sixties escapism. The sight of fighter jets chasing a Model-T over Washington, D.C., takes on an almost creepy modern context, but MacMurray's patented formula of flustered comedy and Olson's good-natured exasperation still charm. Fictional Medfield College, the campus Disney repeatedly recycled over the next dozen years, remains a nostalgic host for Flubberific fun.

Ignore the colorized and cropped version, and enjoy the performances,

original cinematography, and special effects of the original. One of Disney's better comedies, THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR still deserves the proverbial "third time's the charm" DVD release to warrant an "A" grade from fans.

Although Walt Disney frowned on sequels, the Flubber evidently bounced high enough in THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR to warrant one of the studio's few follow-ups produced during Walt's life. If the studio's tear-jerker POLLYANNA offered the best dramatic cast ever assembled for a Disney film, SON OF FLUBBER (1963) may just showcase Disney's best comedic cast, featuring a stable of character

Continued on page 30

Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce Their Last (and First) Bows

THE SHERLOCK HOLMES

COLLECTION Volume III

MPI Home Video—\$69.95

THE HOUND

OF THE BASKERVILLES

THE ADVENTURES

OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

MPI Home Video—\$19.95 each

Conceived over cocktails and euthanized by artistic frustration, Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes remains for many the veritable fathomer of 221B Baker Street. And with the release of Volume III of THE SHERLOCK HOLMES COLLECTION, and the two 20th Century Fox films that started it all in 1939, MPI Home Video gives Sherlockaholics and mystery fans the omega and the alpha of that legendary series by which all other Holmesian productions are measured.

The final four Universal films may not be in the same league as THE PEARL OF DEATH (1944) and THE SCARLET CLAW (1945), but they contain much of interest, especially quirky characters that could have sprung directly from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's pen. There is, for instance, the seemingly gentle Dr. Simnell (Percival Vivian), whose penchant for dollies and scalpels outshines even the suave villainy of Lydia Marlowe (Hilary Brooke) and Professor Moriarty (Henry Daniell) himself in THE WOMAN IN GREEN (1945). Equally memorable are Joel Cairo/Kasper Gutman wannabes Mirko (Martin Kosleck) and Gregor (Rex Evans) in PURSUIT TO ALGIERS (1945), and the pairing of Colonel Sebastian Moran (Alan Mowbray) and slimy hitman Sands (Skelton Knaggs) in TERROR BY NIGHT (1946). Even the victims are interesting, especially Watson's box-loving (musical and otherwise) old

chum, Julian "Stinky" Emery (Edmond Breon), who loses his life to a latter-day Irene Adler in DRESSED TO KILL (1946).

As with the first two collections, the picture quality is lovingly reconstructed from the best 35mm elements, and Roy William Neill's signature chiaroscuro comes off as sinister and as moody as the day it was first lensed. Richard Valley's informative and entertaining liner notes provide extensive background information and biographies of such players as Daniell, Brooke, Kosleck, and the little-known Evans. There's not much else in the way of extras, save for WOMAN IN GREEN commentary by Holmes scholar David Stuart Davies, picture galleries, and a snippet from the 1927 interview with Conan Doyle (here, alas, sounding helium-voiced due to incorrect projection speed). But after years of suffering through faded, scratchy public domain prints of three of these titles, fans will find little to fault in the collection.

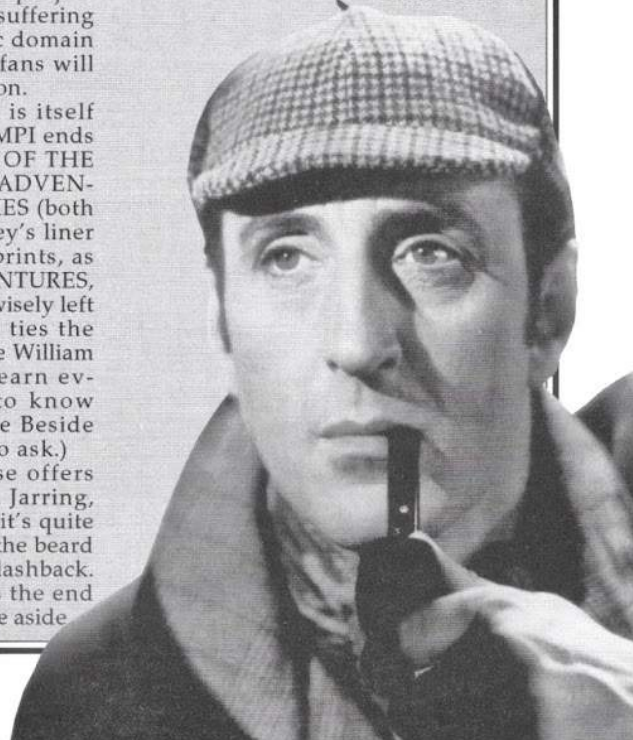
Given that the Holmes saga is itself one of rebirth, it's fitting that MPI ends the series with THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES and THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (both 1939). Once again Richard Valley's liner notes complement excellent prints, as does his commentary for ADVENTURES, wherein he provides scenes unwisely left on the cutting-room floor and ties the film to its tenuous origins in the William Gillette play. (Viewers even learn everything they ever wanted to know about the song "I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside," but were afraid to ask.)

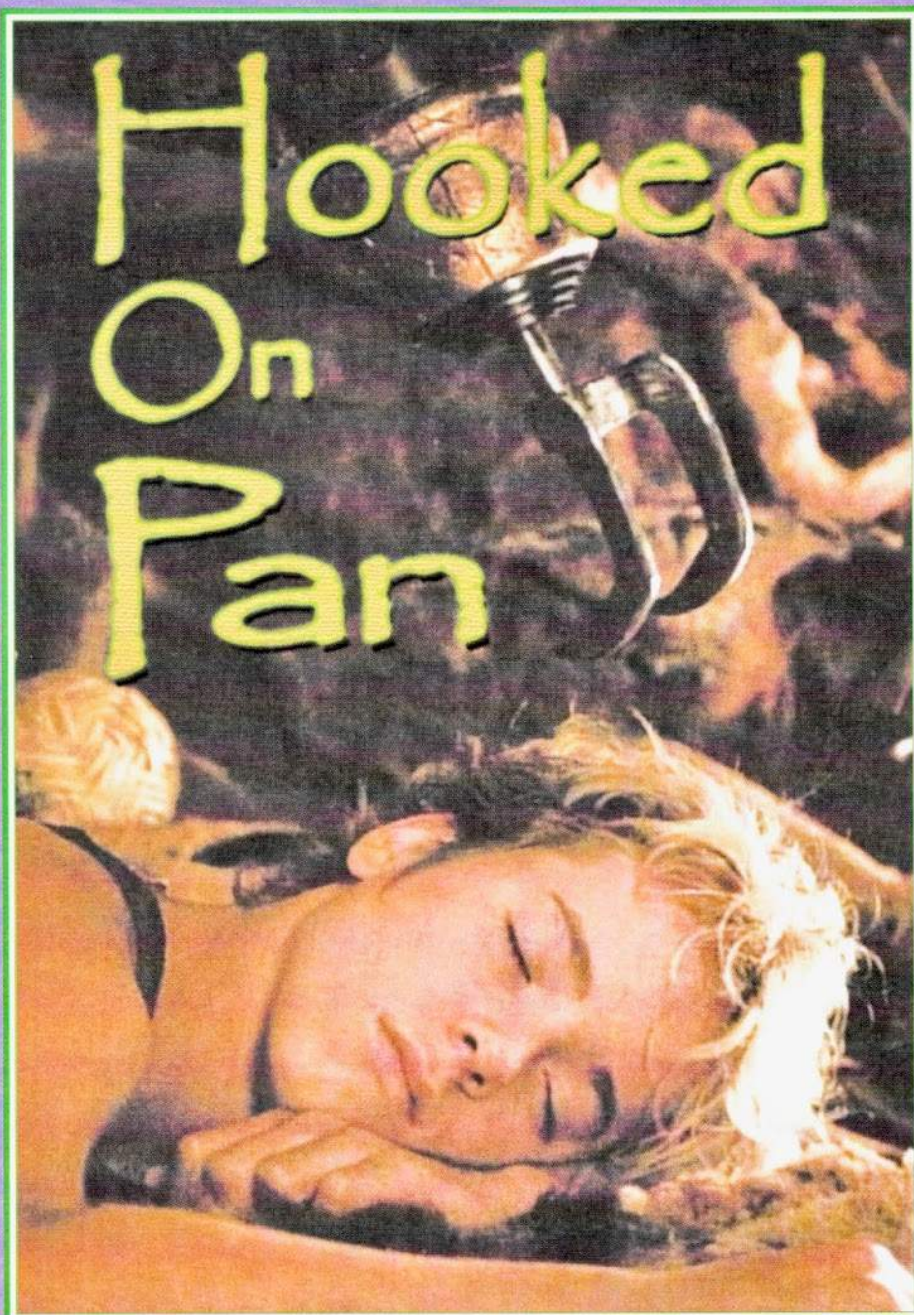
David Stuart Davies likewise offers fine information on HOUND. Jarring, however, is his assertion that "it's quite clearly Richard Greene" under the beard as Sir Hugo Baskerville in the flashback. (It's actually Ralph Forbes—as the end credits attest.) This minor quibble aside

Davis is especially good at discussing the script's fidelity to—and derivations from—the most famous of mystery novels, and going into depth about the "Watson problem."

Said problem, of course, is no problem at all for aficionados. Nigel Bruce may end up removing his shoes and socks while under hypnosis, singing "Loch Lomond," and quacking like a duck, but he gets the last laugh—literally—by providing Holmes with the key to the series' ultimate clue. Revisiting Bruce's lovable duffer in expertly restored prints is like revisiting an old friend; and while his teaming with Rathbone lasted a scant seven years, thanks to MPI, their marvelous work is now for the Ages.

—David F. Morrill





PETER PAN

Universal Studios—\$26.98

James M. Barrie's *PETER PAN*, the boy who wouldn't grow up, is one of the great child fantasies and one of the few fictional characters to have entered the realm of myth. Even before the famous tale was published in 1911, it was as a play in 1904. Considered distinctly British, *PETER PAN* was originally intended for an American, the great actress Maude Adams. (Outside of some rare instances, due originally to English child-labor legal requirements, a woman has traditionally played Peter.)

The story has been a continual source of joy in America. The first live-action movie version, a 1924 Paramount film starring Betty Bronson, was basically the stage play photographed. Walt Disney's 1953 animated version used child actor Bobby

Driscoll for Peter Pan; Driscoll not only voiced the character, but posed for the animators. (Hans Conreid voiced Captain Hook.) On Broadway in 1950, horror icon Boris Karloff lustily sang the Leonard Bernstein score as Hook ("Blood, Sweet Blood!") to Jean Arthur's Pan, in what is considered the play's most successful presentation. In 1955, after a limited Broadway run of a tuneful new version (scored by several composers, including Mark Charlap, Jule Styne, and Carolyn Leigh, and directed by Jerome Robbins), Mary Martin flew into the hearts of American Baby Boomers in the NBC television.

Now we have this new, beautifully rendered production from 2003, written for the screen by director P. J. Hogan and Michael Goldenberg and starring Jason Isaacs as Hook and young American Jeremy Sumpter in the leading role. Among the cast in this Universal

release are Rachel Hurd-Wood as Wendy and Ludivine Sagnier as Tinker Bell. Lynn Redgrave also appears as a new character, Wendy's Aunt Millicent.

On its initial release, this Australian film version got lost amidst the many Christmas releases. It's a motion picture of overwhelming beauty and accomplishment. The special effects are dazzling. The art and costume designs are stunning and echo the famous illustrations of Francis D. Bedford, Edmund Blum-pied, and Roy Best. For once the advance release promise was realized, "new cutting edge technologies portraying breathtaking and fantastic visuals envisioned in the original material—Neverland, the fairies, Tinker Bell, and the magical flying—in ways never before seen cinematically nor imagined."

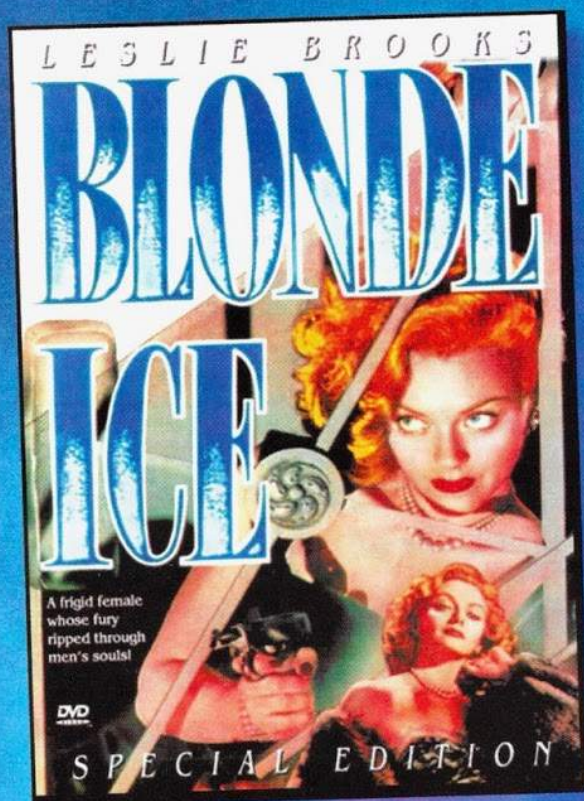
Interestingly, Isaacs and the late Cyril Ritchard, the famous Hook opposite Mary Martin, are both Australian. Ever since Ritchard's famous portrayal, Hooks have tended towards the foppish: George Rose, Christopher Hewitt, and Danny Kaye are perfect examples. Isaacs returns to the early days of George Du Maurier, the original Hook, from whose performance "children were carried screaming from the stalls." Popular writer Daphne Du Maurier described her father's portrayal in her memoir *Gerald* (1934), noting "his greasy curls; the sardonic laugh, the maniacal scream, the appalling courtesy of his gestures . . . There was no peace in those days until the monster was destroyed . . ."

The DVD presentation is marred by an annoying preview for the dismal *CAT IN THE HAT* (2003). Extras include several behind-the-scenes featurettes. A short documentary hosted by Sarah Ferguson, *THE LEGACY OF PAN*, offers glimpses of Pan historian Andrew Birkin, but little of the history of this fascinating tale. Oddly, all the production material ignores the Paramount film version as if it never existed. A few deleted sequences are offered, including the ending used in the musical version, of Peter returning years later to discover Wendy grown up and her daughter Jane anxious for adventure. It's clear from its unfinished state that wiser heads ruled against its inclusion. The sequence—originally a once-only performance onstage—wouldn't have worked nearly as well as it does in the musical adaptation. All of these extras reveal perhaps too much for young viewers and spoil the magic so abundantly onscreen in the feature.

The DVD is close-captioned and available in both widescreen and full-frame editions, with Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound.

—Farnham Scott

ICE in her veins... ICICLES on her heart...



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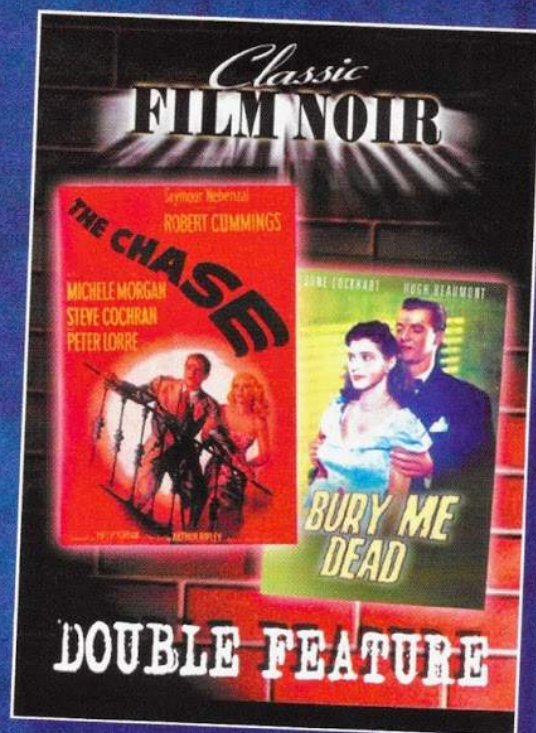


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SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 27

actors reminiscent of IT'S A MAD MAD MAD MAD WORLD, which was released the same year.

Having signed away the rights for Flubber, Professor Ned Brainard (MacMurray again) this time tinkers with the weather as he searches for a new space-age invention to save his cash-strapped college and his marriage to his affection-starved wife, Betsy (Nancy Olson). Also returning are Tommy Kirk (as Biff Hawk), Elliott Reid (as Shelby Ashton) and three generations of Wynns: Ed (as A. J. Allen, who exhibits the fruits—and vegetables—of Brainard's experimentation to an astonished court), son Keenan (returning as villain Alonzo P. Hawk, a role he reprised in 1974's HERBIE RIDES AGAIN), and grandson Ned in a minor role. (Look for Walt's grandson Walter as the baby in the Flubber commercial.)

Spotting the great supporting cast react to special effects-induced mayhem offers the most fun; you'll spot Paul Lynde, Hal Smith, Burt Mustin, Jack Albertson, Leon Ames, Charlie Ruggles, Harvey Korman, Joe Flynn, Edward Andrews, Harriet MacGibbon, Ken Murray, and William Demarest among the gawkers. Also notable is Joanna Moore (Tatum O'Neal's mother) as Southern sexpot Desiree de la Roche, still hot for old flame Ned Brainard; her role sparks friction between Ned and Betsy and motivates the professor to win back his wife and save the day at work.

Although the full-frame DVD offers no commentary and just a few behind-the-scenes photos, Disney did at least remember to release it in the original black-and-white. Like father, like son—SON OF FLUBBER is a suitable heir to the original and a lot of fun.

—Jim Hollifield

BACK TO THE BEACH

Paramount Home Video—\$14.99

Annette (Annette Funicello) and her husband, "The Big Kahuna" (Frankie Avalon, portraying this otherwise unnamed character), follow the tide BACK TO THE BEACH (1987) to visit their adult daughter, Sandi (Lori Loughlin). The inevitable lure of the surf entices them back into their former lifestyle. Much of the humor springs from the couple's humor-in-the-sixties wholesomeness, an anachronism that joltingly contrasts with the more uninhibited morality of the late eighties.

In a playful nod to the AIP Beach Party films, the mercurial on-again, off-again dynamic of Annette's relationship with her husband surfaces anew when Connie (Connie Stevens) makes a play for him. Annette's knee-jerk reaction is a familiar one to devotees: she feigns interest in Troy (John Calvin), a younger beach bum, to even the score. The scantily-clad lad really isn't sexually interested in her, but the charade is enough to get the Big Kahuna's dander up.

The well-preserved leads are joined by such beloved pop culture icons as

Edd "Kookie" Byrnes, Don Adams, O. J. Simpson, and cast members from the sitcoms LEAVE IT TO BEAVER and GILLIGAN'S ISLAND. Onscreen musical performances are contributed by Dick Dale, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Pee-wee Herman (Paul Reubens). Additionally, the soundtrack boasts a diverse potpourri of artists, including Aimee Mann, Eddie Money, Dave Edmunds, Herbie Hancock, Marti Jones, and Dweezil Zappa. The inspired mix of sixties and eighties musical conventions is arguably the production's strongest selling point. The final ensemble number, "Some Things Live Forever," seems inspired by the song "We Go Together" that climaxed the similarly nostalgic GREASE (1978).



Paramount's DVD presents BACK TO THE BEACH letterboxed at approximately 1.85:1. The colors are sharp and the source print free of blemishes. The disc offers a robust sound mix that will please audiophiles.

—John F. Black

KING OF THE ZOMBIES

Alpha Video—\$7.98

The DVD presentation of KING OF THE ZOMBIES (1941)—such as it is—is in keeping with the film's Poverty Row origins. The disc features no extras and only four untitled chapters of the movie itself. Chapter One begins not with the opening credits, but 12 minutes into the movie! Alpha Video has packaged a jerky, overscanned print with dirty reel changes and a loss of information at the top of the screen (especially noticeable in the opening credits and in shots in which heads are partially cut off). Even a Monogram programmer deserves much better DVD treatment than this! Still, it's always fun and nostalgic to see Monogram quickies (CREATURE FEATURES fare to Baby Boomers) and to enjoy Mantan Moreland's comedic talents.

The movie itself is the mildly entertaining story of three men (Dick Purcell,



John Archer, and Moreland) who crash land on a Caribbean island. There, Dr. Mikhail Sangre (Henry Victor, in a role intended for Bela Lugosi) has transformed the natives into zombies ("fugitives from the undertaker," as Moreland comically characterizes the lurching crew). What is described as "rites of transmigration"—the mad doctor's mystical process by which he turns people into zombies—turns out to be mere hypnosis, and Dr. Sangre's motive for his chicanery is to steal U.S. secrets about "canal-zone fortifications" for his unnamed country. Two years after KING OF THE ZOMBIES, when U.S. involvement in World War II was in full swing, REVENGE OF THE ZOMBIES (1943), also starring Mantan Moreland and also scripted by Edmond Kelso) revisited the theme of mad doctors and zombies working for the Nazis.

KING OF THE ZOMBIES has the dubious distinction of being one of 20 nominees for the 1941 Academy Award for best music score. Prolific B-movie composer Edward Kay also wrote music for Joe Palooka, Maggie and Jiggs, and Bomba the Jungle Boy movies; his ZOMBIES score lost the Oscar to Bernard Herrmann's music for ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY.

—Jeff Thompson

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

BBC Video—\$26.99

MAURICE

Home Vision Entertainment—\$29.95

Ismail Merchant and James Ivory have been successful partners in both filmmaking and life for 40 years. Now two of their three E. M. Forster novel adaptations (the third being 1992's HOWARD'S END) have newly arrived on special edition DVDs.

Three-time Oscar winner A ROOM WITH A VIEW (1985) opens with Lucy Honeychurch (Helena Bonham-Carter) on a cultural enrichment tour of Europe with her cousin, Charlotte Bartlett (Maggie Smith). Real life intrudes in Florence as Lucy witnesses a violent street fight, then receives a passionate kiss in a barley field from George Emerson (Julian Sands), who is also touring Italy with his father (Denholm Elliott).

Hushing up the scandalous behavior of the two, Charlotte rushes Lucy home to England and her safe fiancé, insufferable twit Cecil Vyse (Daniel Day-Lewis). Lucy's attempt to put Florence be-

Continued on page 66

Truth, Justice, & The American Way

The Life And Times Of Noel Neill

The Original Lois Lane

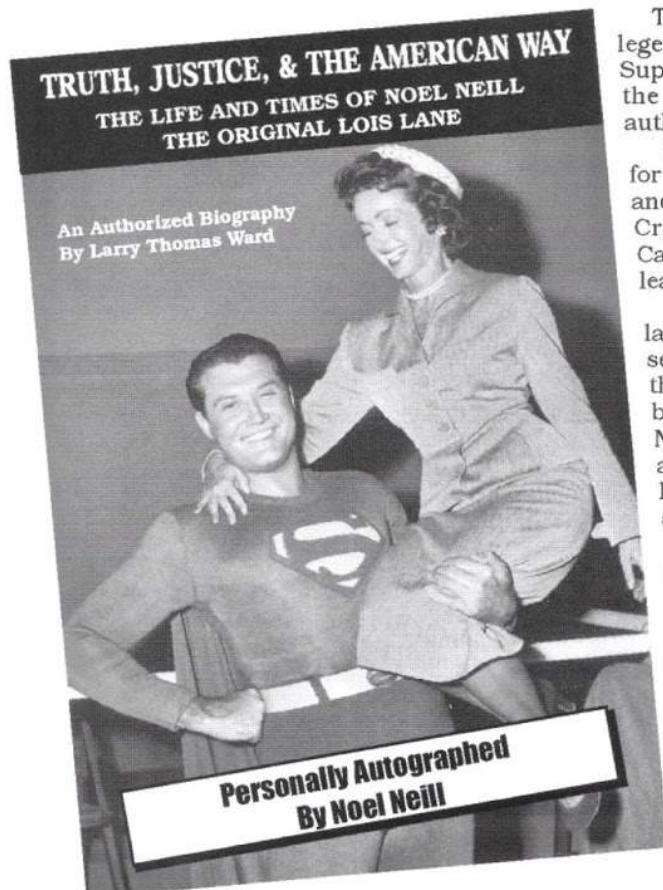
An Authorized Biography By Larry Thomas Ward

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158 pages including 158 Black & White Photographs (Many Rare & Previously Unpublished)

From The Personal Collection Of Miss Noel Neill. 9" X 12" Softbound.

ISBN 0-9729466-0-8



The year 2004 marks the 56th Anniversary of Noel Neill's legendary and original screen portrayal of "Lois Lane" from Superman. Until now, Noel had resisted all efforts to cooperate in the chronicling of her life and career. This book is the only authorized biography of this extraordinary actress.

Before Superman, Noel Neill started out as an actual news reporter for *Women's Wear Daily*. She began her acting career as a singer and dancer on the live stage, and after a chance meeting with Bing Crosby, was hired to sing with his band at his nightclub in Del Mar, California. This friendship led to other nightclub work, eventually leading to character roles in over eighty feature films!

In 1948, after several years with Paramount Pictures, Noel landed the role of "Lois Lane" in the Columbia Pictures movie serial, *Superman*, opposite Kirk Alyn. The enormous success of this film necessitated a 1950 sequel. Then the television series began with George Reeves, and in seventy-eight episodes, Noel Neill set the standard for all "Lois Lanes" yet to come. Her later appearance in the 1978 Christopher Reeve feature film made her the only actress to appear in this role in all three film genres: serials, television, and feature films.

Truth, Justice, & The American Way is a rare biography that offers an exhaustive history of Miss Neill's professional acting career, coupled with museum-quality photographs, most of which are previously unpublished. These photographs go as far back as the 1920s and include her work in vaudeville and radio as a child, many of her films as a young starlet, modeling photographs, all of her Superman work, and glimpses of her personal and professional life today. Since Noel has given the author exclusive and unconditional access to all of her records and documents – and most importantly, her memories – something no other writer has acquired, this book is not only a one-of-a-kind publication, but a collector's item, as well.

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Van Helsing

The Man Who Slew Too Much

by Farnham Scott and Richard Valley

One night, during a performance of *HAMLET* at London's Lyceum Theatre, a torch carried onstage by one of the cast members set fire to a hanging drape. Though the fire was quickly extinguished, the smoky odor still reached the audience, causing some theatergoers to jump from their seats. One man raced up the aisle. The Lyceum's house manager, sensing danger and fearing a rush for the doors, caught the fellow by the throat and with one sweep sent him to the floor. It worked; no one else moved.

The house manager helped the man to his feet and rebuked him sternly, saying, "Go back to your seat, sir. It's cowards like you who cause death to helpless women."

It was not the first time that a sudden, decisive move had shown Bram Stoker's gallantry.

In addition to his house manager duties, Stoker was also the confidante and business manager of the leading actor of the Victorian era, Sir Henry Irving—the first actor to be honored with a knighthood, and the owner of the Lyceum. Stoker's heroics were not always "theatrical"—he was given a medal for risking his life in attempting the rescue of a suicide by leaping from a Thames ferry in assistance. Much of his penchant for protecting women—and perhaps a good deal more of his own nature—found its way into Stoker's immortal novel *Dracula* (1897) and the Lord of the Undead's nemesis, Professor Abraham Van Helsing. In the novel, Mina Harker describes Van Helsing as:

"... a man of medium height, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well-balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes one at once indicative of thought and power; the head is noble... the face clean-shaven... a hard, square chin, a large resolute, mobile mouth, a good sized nose, rather straight, but with quick, sensitive nostrils... The forehead is broad and fine, such a forehead that the reddish hair cannot possibly tumble over it... Big, dark blue eyes are

set widely apart, and are quick and tender or stern with the man's moods."

Physically, the character is hardly the Van Helsing of Universal's classic *DRACULA* (1931)—Edward Van Sloan. Nor does he resemble Peter Cushing in Hammer's equally classic *HORROR OF DRACULA* (1958) and four sequels. So it should come as no surprise that, in his latest incarnation, Professor Abraham Van Helsing—renamed Gabriel—was transformed from an aging Dutchman into a young, mercenary killer in a swirling coat and Indiana Jones hat. The film was *VAN HELSING*, and Van Helsing was Hugh Jackman.

Jackman had some tough acts to follow.

"Life is nothing, I heed him not—for if we fail and this vampire conquers, it is not mere life and death—it is that we become as himself, foul things of the night, without heart or conscience. But we are face to face with duty. Shall we shrink from it—what say you?"

—*DRACULA, THE VAMPIRE PLAY* (1924)

Within *Dracula*'s narrative, Van Helsing wears a considerable number of hats. His former pupil, John Seward, in love with the doomed Lucy Westenra, describes his mentor as a "philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day... an iron nerve, indomitable in resolution... and the kindest and truest heart that beats." (One half expects Seward to finish with, "And he can cook, too!") Added to Seward's litany: Van Helsing is a medical doctor (with amazing luck at transfusions in the years before blood typing) and has a law degree, to boot. Certainly, Stoker saw to it that the bloodthirsty count had a worthy hero in opposition. By the tale's end, Old Abraham has taken on the mantle of father, mentor, sage, shaman, and—almost—saint.

Van Helsing was a composite. Stoker gave the character his father's name, then imbued him with



LEFT: It isn't enough that he's caught outside in a downpour without a raincoat, but Frankenstein's Monster (Shuler Hensley) also has to be subjected to CGI lightning effects in *VAN HELSING* (2004). RIGHT: Count Dracula (Richard Roxburgh) has evil plans for Doc Frankenstein's creation in *VAN HELSING*, and they don't involve Abbott and Costello.



many of his own qualities and values. However, the "real" Professor Van Helsing in Stoker's own life was—as he refers to him in tribute within the novel's pages—"friend Arminius of Beda-Pesth University." This was Arminius Vambery, professor of Oriental languages. Like Van Helsing, who knew "a dozen languages as well as his own," Vambery spoke 16 languages and knew 20. It was after a night with Irving, Stoker, friend and fellow author Hall Caine (to whom *Dracula* is dedicated), and Vambery swapping ghost stories at dinner following a performance at the Lyceum, that the Count started stirring in his crypt.

Stoker certainly intended *Dracula* as a possible role for Henry Irving—the character being drawn from Irving's performances in such plays as *FAUST*, *THE LYONS MAIL*, *MACBETH*, and *LOUIS IV*—but he was doomed to disappointment. At a reading of the play arranged at the Lyceum before a paying audience in order to ensure a copyright, Irving watched with amusement from the back of the house. As he stole away, someone whispered an inquiry as to his reaction; Irving's single word appraisal, "Dreadful!" was heard resounding and echoing through the theater.

When *Dracula* was finally transformed from the novel to the stage, well after Stoker's death, the Transylvanian nobleman was no longer an aged ghoul with a foul stench, white hair, and hairy palms, but a suave, Byronic Continental—in other words, Bela Lugosi. However, Van Helsing didn't change very much in

the transition to the stage. He was still bright, but with a Double-Dutch accent. He was incredibly wise, but his rather ill-timed humor in the novel was not so much in evidence.

Before the play came one of the most famous film versions of *Dracula*—*NOSFERATU, A SYMPHONY OF HORROR* (1922), directed by F. W. Murnau. Florence Stoker, feeling threatened by this unlicensed version of her late husband's novel, which was now her only annuity and support, got an injunction against the German Prana Films production. While Max Schreck's characterization of Graf Orlok is still the closest visual representation to Stoker's original conception of Count Dracula, the character of Van Helsing barely exists in the film's Professor Bulwer (John Gottowt). Bulwer is present mainly to offer a lecture on vampiric parasites. He remains a lesser character, not the bold, dynamic Van Helsing of the novel and play.

The author of *DRACULA, THE VAMPIRE PLAY* (1922) was Hamilton Deane. Deane had become a successful actor since his 1899 debut in Henry Irving's Vacation Company. He was proficient in Shakespeare and popular in old English comedies, but it was *Dracula* that intrigued him. He carried a copy of it everywhere. It had become his favorite book and he was sure that Stoker, whom he knew, would fashion a play of it himself. Yet after that first dramatic reading, nothing had come of it. In 1912, when Stoker died, Deane was acting in New York. He returned to England in 1918 and

LEFT: Gabriel Van Helsing (Hugh Jackman) shows off his great big gun to vampire hunting Anna Valerious (Kate Beckinsale). RIGHT: Inspired by 1967's *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* (which was inspired by 1963's *KISS OF THE VAMPIRE*), *Dracula* throws a masquerade ball. No reflection on Drac, but Anna just can't see him in the role of party host.



Van Helsing

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It was not the first time that a sudden, decisive move had shown Bram Stoker's gallantry.

In addition to his house manager duties, Stoker was also the confidante and business manager of the leading actor of the Victorian era, Sir Henry Irving—the first actor to be honored with a knighthood, and the owner of the Lyceum. Stoker's heroics were not always "theatrical"—he was given a medal for risking his life in attempting the rescue of a suicide by leaping from a Thames ferry in assistance. Much of his penchant for protecting women—and perhaps a good deal more of his own nature—found its way into Stoker's immortal novel *Dracula* (1897) and the Lord of the Undead's nemesis, Professor Abraham Van Helsing. In the novel, Mina Harker describes Van Helsing as:

"... a man of medium height, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well-balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes one at once indicative of thought and power; the head is noble... the face clean-shaven... a hard, square chin, a large resolute, mobile mouth, a good sized nose, rather straight, but with quick, sensitive nostrils... The forehead is broad and fine, such a forehead that the reddish hair cannot possibly tumble over it... Big, dark blue eyes are

set widely apart, and are quick and tender or stern with the man's moods."

Physically, the character is hardly the Van Helsing of Universal's classic *DRACULA* (1931)—Edward Van Sloan. Nor does he resemble Peter Cushing in Hammer's equally classic *HORROR OF DRACULA* (1958) and four sequels. So it should come as no surprise that, in his latest incarnation, Professor Abraham Van Helsing—renamed Gabriel—was transformed from an aging Dutchman into a young, mercenary killer in a swirling coat and Indiana Jones hat. The film was *VAN HELSING*, and Van Helsing was Hugh Jackman.

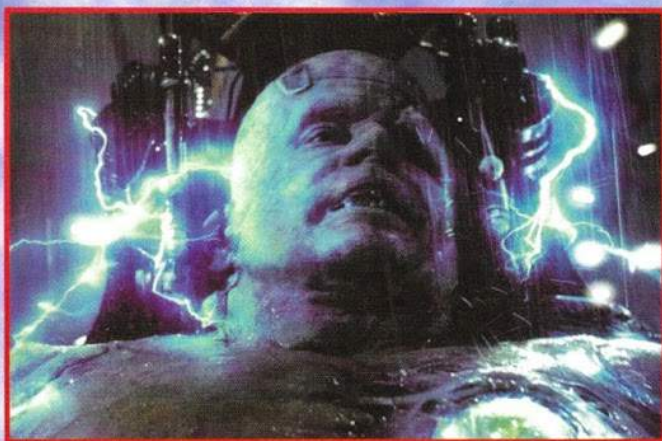
Jackman had some tough acts to follow.

"Life is nothing, I heed him not—for if we fail and this vampire conquers, it is not mere life and death—it is that we become as himself, foul things of the night, without heart or conscience. But we are face to face with duty. Shall we shrink from it—what say you?"

—*DRACULA, THE VAMPIRE PLAY* (1924)

Within *Dracula's* narrative, Van Helsing wears a considerable number of hats. His former pupil, John Seward, in love with the doomed Lucy Westenra, describes his mentor as a "philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day... an iron nerve, indomitable in resolution... and the kindest and truest heart that beats." (One half expects Seward to finish with, "And he can cook, too!") Added to Seward's litany: Van Helsing is a medical doctor (with amazing luck at transfusions in the years before blood typing) and has a law degree, to boot. Certainly, Stoker saw to it that the bloodthirsty count had a worthy hero in opposition. By the tale's end, Old Abraham has taken on the mantle of father, mentor, sage, shaman, and—almost—saint.

Van Helsing was a composite. Stoker gave the character his father's name, then imbued him with



LEFT: It isn't enough that he's caught outside in a downpour without a raincoat, but Frankenstein's Monster (Shuler Hensley) also has to be subjected to CGI lightning effects in *VAN HELSING* (2004). RIGHT: Count Dracula (Richard Roxburgh) has evil plans for Doc Frankenstein's creation in *VAN HELSING*, and they don't involve Abbott and Costello.

many of his own qualities and values. However, the "real" Professor Van Helsing in Stoker's own life was—as he refers to him in tribute within the novel's pages—"friend Arminius of Beda-Pesth University." This was Arminius Vambery, professor of Oriental languages. Like Van Helsing, who knew "a dozen languages as well as his own," Vambery spoke 16 languages and knew 20. It was after a night with Irving, Stoker, friend and fellow author Hall Caine (to whom *Dracula* is dedicated), and Vambery swapping ghost stories at dinner following a performance at the Lyceum, that the Count started stirring in his crypt.

Stoker certainly intended *Dracula* as a possible role for Henry Irving—the character being drawn from Irving's performances in such plays as *FAUST*, *THE LYONS MAIL*, *MACBETH*, and *LOUIS IV*—but he was doomed to disappointment. At a reading of the play arranged at the Lyceum before a paying audience in order to ensure a copyright, Irving watched with amusement from the back of the house. As he stole away, someone whispered an inquiry as to his reaction; Irving's single word appraisal, "Dreadful!" was heard resounding and echoing through the theater.

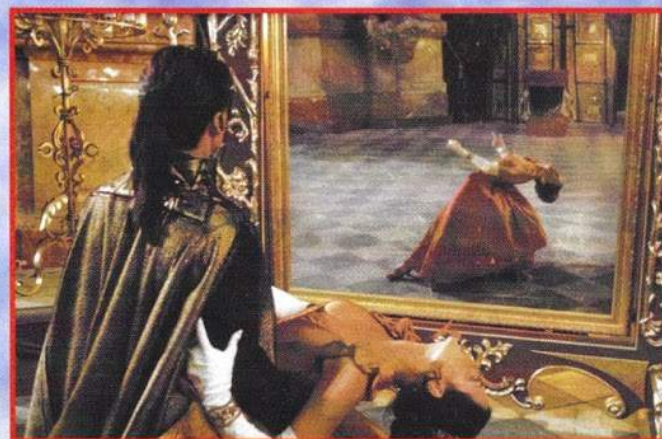
When *Dracula* was finally transformed from the novel to the stage, well after Stoker's death, the Transylvanian nobleman was no longer an aged ghoul with a foul stench, white hair, and hairy palms, but a suave, Byronic Continental—in other words, Bela Lugosi. However, Van Helsing didn't change very much in

the transition to the stage. He was still bright, but with a Double-Dutch accent. He was incredibly wise, but his rather ill-timed humor in the novel was not so much in evidence.

Before the play came one of the most famous film versions of *Dracula*—*NOSFERATU, A SYMPHONY OF HORROR* (1922), directed by F. W. Murnau. Florence Stoker, feeling threatened by this unlicensed version of her late husband's novel, which was now her only annuity and support, got an injunction against the German Prana Films production. While Max Schreck's characterization of Graf Orlok is still the closest visual representation to Stoker's original conception of Count Dracula, the character of Van Helsing barely exists in the film's Professor Bulwer (John Gottowt). Bulwer is present mainly to offer a lecture on vampiric parasites. He remains a lesser character, not the bold, dynamic Van Helsing of the novel and play.

The author of *DRACULA, THE VAMPIRE PLAY* (1922) was Hamilton Deane. Deane had become a successful actor since his 1899 debut in Henry Irving's Vacation Company. He was proficient in Shakespeare and popular in old English comedies, but it was *Dracula* that intrigued him. He carried a copy of it everywhere. It had become his favorite book and he was sure that Stoker, whom he knew, would fashion a play of it himself. Yet after that first dramatic reading, nothing had come of it. In 1912, when Stoker died, Deane was acting in New York. He returned to England in 1918 and

LEFT: Gabriel Van Helsing (Hugh Jackman) shows off his great big gun to vampire hunting Anna Valerious (Kate Beckinsale). RIGHT: Inspired by 1967's *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* (which was inspired by 1963's *KISS OF THE VAMPIRE*), *Dracula* throws a masquerade ball. No reflection on Drac, but Anna just can't see him in the role of party host.





In Universal's *DRACULA* (1931), Dr. Abraham Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) and Count Dracula (Bela Lugosi) have two classic confrontations. In the first (BELOW LEFT), Van Helsing tricks the sinister nobleman into revealing his undead condition by opening a mirrored cigarette box and proving that vampires hate filter tips. In the second (ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT), Dracula attempts to gain hypnotic control of the vampire hunter, but—thanks to a crucifix—fails.

began his own theatrical repertory company. The Widow Stoker, meanwhile, was anxious after suppressing the renegade *NOSFERATU* and liked the idea of having an authorized dramatization to use in her wranglings. She gave her consent to have *Dracula* adapted to the stage, and Deane fashioned a stage version that was playable on tour throughout the British Provinces.

Convinced that a London opening would be met with negative reviews that might mar the piece's utility on the road, Deane had scaled back much of the work's larger events—for instance, Harker's initial adventures in the wilds of Transylvania and the race to get back to Dracula's castle in the latter part of the book—in order to make it suitable for touring. Pleased with the results,

Deane had originally intended to play Dracula himself (rather a small role, actually, for a title character) and relax a bit from his headliner duties in his acting company. The play was being put up quickly, though, and Deane—already familiar with the dialogue and with time at a premium—took on the Van Helsing role himself. Late in life, Deane finally got to play Dracula and, at a special performance, was greeted at the curtain call by Bela Lugosi himself, who had by that time earned international recognition in the role.

DRACULA, THE VAMPIRE PLAY opened at the Grand Theatre, Derby, in 1924. After successfully stumping about the provinces, it opened its West End engagement at Little Theatre, London, in 1927. Dracula, the caped one, had invaded London at last.

"You ask how the Vampire King, during the hours of the night, the hours that are his, comes and goes? As the wind, my friend, as he pleases."

—*DRACULA, THE VAMPIRE PLAY* (1927)

When Hamilton Deane's rather provincial and over-written prose was transformed into a much sleeker version of *Dracula* by playwright John Balderston for producer Horace Liverwright's American production, the role of Van Helsing was offered to Edward Van Sloan (1881-1964), whom Liverwright had seen playing an Austrian psychiatrist in Hans Werfel's play *SHWEIGER* (1926). David J. Skal, *DRACULA*'s preeminent historian, quotes a *San Francisco Chronicle* interview with Van Sloan from 1932 in his well-annotated 1993 edition of the Deane/Balderston play. Said Van Sloan: "I had been in five plays, none of which had lasted more than three weeks. I went into *DRACULA*, figuring it would at least buy cakes and ale for a fortnight. I proceeded to play it for 22 months, as *DRACULA* romped merrily through colossal runs in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and out to the coast."

In the Balderston adaptation of Deane's play, Van Helsing is described as a brisk-walking man of "medium height in the early fifties, with clean-shaven, astute face, shaggy grey eyebrows and a mass of grey hair which is brushed backward showing a high forehead. Dark piercing eyes set far apart; nervous, alert manner; an air of resolution, clearly a man of resourceful action, incisive speech, always to the point; raps his words out sharply and quickly." Balderston might just as well have been describing Abraham Stoker, Bram's father, but it also suits Van Sloan.

In the 1931 Universal film version directed by Tod Browning, Van Sloan (along with Herbert Bunston as Dr. Seward, now Lucy's father instead of gentleman caller) was retained from the Broadway run—and, after some



deliberation, Bela Lugosi as well. *Variety* (February 18, 1931) said of the film, "On the screen it comes out as a sublimated ghost story related with all surface seriousness and above all with a remarkably effective background of creepy atmosphere."

The role of Van Helsing was said to be one of Van Sloan's least favorites. He also had turns in *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* (1934) and *THE STORY OF LOUIS PASTEUR* (1935)—but to Scarlet Streeters, he will always be the nemesis of evil in such favorites as *DRACULA*, *FRANKENSTEIN* (1931), and *THE MUMMY* (1932). It's a pity that he didn't relish what has become his most remembered role. In *DRACULA*, he is superb. With his brushed-back hair, peering gaze, coke-bottle glasses, and staunch, resolute manner, he matches Bela Lugosi's masterful creation of the Count very well. On film, his confrontation with Dracula, as it did onstage in New York and all across America, rings with theatricality. Dracula's description of Van Helsing from Garrett Fort's screenplay—"For one who has not lived even a single lifetime, you're a wise man, Van Helsing"—still thrills.

Five years beyond *DRACULA*, after a turbulent pre-production history, Lugosi actually was paid more for not appearing in the sequel, *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER* (1936), than he was paid for the original film. Garrett Fort's screenplay—following treatments by John L. Balderston and Kurt Neumann—was altered so that the Count remained staked rather than returning to life.

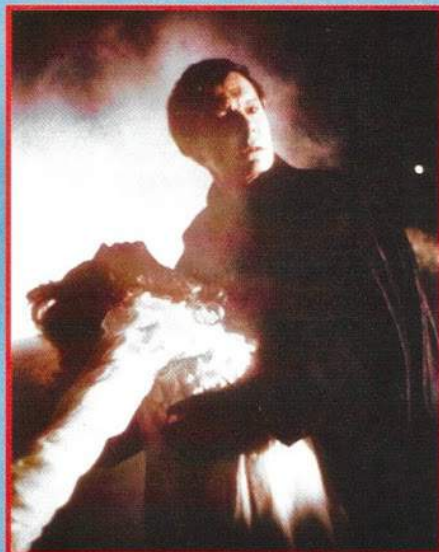
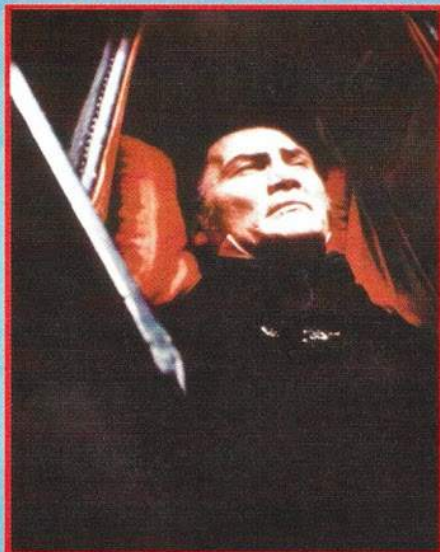
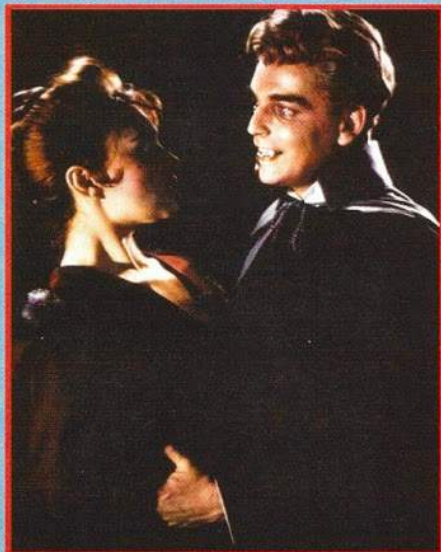
DRACULA'S DAUGHTER was produced by Universal, directed by Lambert Hillyer, and starred Gloria Holden in the title role. The film's greatest merit is her understated performance, with its surprising (for the period) hint of lesbianism. The film also boasts a fine score by Heinz Roemheld and a skilled supporting cast, including Otto Kruger, Marquerite Churchill, Irving Pichel, Nan Grey, Gilbert Emery, E. E. Clive, and Billy Bevan.

Though the Lord of the Undead had been reduced to a waxen figure in a box, Professor Van Helsing was retained for the sequel—and inexplicably renamed Von Helsing. Van Sloan again portrayed the now Austrian doctor. The picture picks up almost precisely where *DRACULA* left off, with Renfield (Dwight Frye in 1931)



dead at the bottom of a flight of stairs and Von Helsing, brushing dirt from his hands, just emerging from the catacombs where he's dispatched Dracula. The rest of *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER*'s cast has vanished, and remains in absentia even after the professor is accused of murder for driving a stake through a man's heart. Von Helsing's longtime friend, Dr. Seward, is nowhere in evidence. Mina Seward and John Harker are evidently married and off on their honeymoon, and are never referred to at all—while Renfield, the "pet loony" of Seward's Sanatorium, is hardly referred to again. These are bothersome details that are best not dwelt upon, since *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER*—with its improved technique and clean, brisk storytelling—is a fine exercise in horror, considered by many to be superior to the original. (In any event, the incongruities are hardly as extreme as, say, moving the remote tower in 1931's *FRANKENSTEIN* right next door to the family castle in 1939's *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN*, or having Kharis sink in a Massachusetts swamp in 1944's *THE MUMMY'S GHOST* only to have him emerge in Louisiana in the same year's *THE MUMMY'S CURSE*.) Van Sloan's appearance has changed along with his character's name.

A great variety of Van Helsing have—naturally—opposed a great variety of Count Draculas. **TOP RIGHT:** Christopher Lee's Dracula matched wits with Peter Cushing's Van Helsing for the last time in *THE SATANIC RITES OF DRACULA* (1974). Like many, though, he was no match for a treacherous bush. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Baron Meinster (David Peel) wasn't Dracula, but they were very good friends. In fact, the baron tried to make pretty Marianne (Yvonne Monlaur) one of *THE BRIDES OF DRACULA* (1960) Cushing was again Van Helsing. **BOTTOM CENTER:** Jack Palance was the Vampire King to Nigel Davenport's Van Helsing in *Dan Curtis' DRACULA* (1973). **BOTTOM RIGHT:** "She is not thinking of me!" Dracula (Louis Jourdan) looks out for Van Helsing (Frank Finlay) while attacking Lucy Westenra (Susan Penhaligon) in *COUNT DRACULA* (1977).





While Tod Browning's *DRACULA* was busy filming on the Universal lot during the day, George Melford's Spanish-language *DRACULA* (1931)—considered directorially superior by many film critics—filmed through the night. **LEFT:** A subplot of the Spanish film not shared by the Browning version concerns the secret desire of Renfield (Pablo Álvarez Rubio) to make it big in show biz. Here, he performs his celebrated Jolson impression for Dr. Seward (José Soriano Viosca), Dr. Van Helsing (Eduardo Arozamena), and Martin (Manuel Arbó). **RIGHT:** Renfield sings "The Bat That Got Away," complete with Judy Garland gestures. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward realize that the clever bloodsucker was simply stringing Renfield along.

The hair is flat and parted. The dynamism of his actions have been replaced by pronouncements uttered in a calm manner with none of the verve—some might say overacting—he displayed in the original incarnation. (Van Sloan thought his performance hammy in *DRACULA*.) Though quiet and restrained, Van Sloan is still effective, and his cry that a friend (Kruger as Dr. Jeffrey Garth) is "going to his death" remains one of the film's highlights.

This was the last moviegoers saw of Van Helsing for awhile. The professor was heard, though, in a splendid adaptation of Stoker's novel by—and starring—Orson Welles, who portrayed both Dracula and Dr. Seward in the first radio broadcast of the *MERCURY THEATRE OF THE AIR* (1938). Van Helsing had the voice of Martin Gable, who many years later portrayed another memorable Victorian professor—James Moriarty—in the Broadway musical *BAKER STREET* (1965).

While Van Helsing was taking a much-needed holiday, other vampire hunters kept the torch burning and

the stakes sharp. The B Team included Professor Laszlo (J. Edward Bromberg) in *SON OF DRACULA* (1943), Dr. Lloyd Clayton (George Zucco) in *DEAD MEN WALK* (1943), Lady Jane Ainsley (Frieda Inescort) in *THE RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE* (1944), and John Meyerman (John Wengraf) in *THE RETURN OF DRACULA* (1958). Even The Wolf Man himself—Larry Talbot (Lon Chaney Jr.)—fought the Vampire King, alongside Dr. Franz Edelman (Onslow Stevens) in *HOUSE OF DRACULA* (1945) and helped and hindered by Chick Young (Bud Abbott) and Wilbur Gray (Lou Costello) in the classic *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN* (1948).

Some 22 years following *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER*, Van Helsing experienced a cinematic rebirth in the Hammer Films production, *DRACULA* (1958), released in the United States as *HORROR OF DRACULA*. Van Helsing would find one of his most satisfying personifications in that "gentle man of horror"—Peter Cushing.

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LEFT: *HORROR OF DRACULA* (1958) helped raise a small British company named Hammer to a level of horror movie immortality matched only by the much larger Universal Pictures. Peter Cushing (pictured with Michael Gough, Melissa Stribling, and Olga Dickie) became the Van Helsing for a new generation of fans. **RIGHT:** Sporting the latest in batsuits, Dracula (Gary Oldman) confronts Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves), Professor Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins), Quincey P. Morris (Bill Campbell), and Lord Arthur Holmwood (Cary Elwes) in *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* (1992). It wasn't Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.



Van Helsing: What Went Wrong?

by Farnham Scott

In the beginning, it must have seemed an inspiration to have Steven Sommers work his MUMMY (1999) magic and get all the gang of ghoulies together—Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, The Wolf Man—for a good old-fashioned monster rally. Instead of having them meet Abbott and Costello, the film would feature two attractive young actors on the rise—international star of stage and screen Hugh Jackman and the lovely Kate Beckinsale. Throw one of the largest budgets ever for a horror film into the mix to provide cutting-edge CGI special effects from Industrial Light and Magic and the expertise of Greg Cannom's classy monster creations and voila—a new franchise-worthy project that will spin off action figures, video collections, video games, a new ride for Universal Theme Parks, a TV series, an animated short subject, and the obligatory sequel. Dress it up for the big summer popcorn movie. Who needs a script? We have a concept! James Bond Meets the Monsters. Somehow, somehow, a great many executives gave this a green light.

There are facets to VAN HELSING that deserve praise. The wonders of CGI continue to improve and, if the

characters generated have no more reality to them than a video game, the vistas and set designs are truly excellent. Allan Daviau's photography and the production design by Alan Cameron are top-notch and evocative of classics from horrors past. The talented cast includes Shuler Hensley as the Frankenstein Monster (referred to at least once as "Frankenstein"). Will Kemp brings his dancer's grace to the role of The Wolf Man. It is insufficient, though.

Perhaps the most grievous error is the insistence on nonstop action over horror. There's never a moment of suspense or quiet fear or anticipation, let alone time for pathos. After an impressive black-and-white homage to the horror films of Universal's past, we are suddenly thrown into what appears to be VAN HELSING MEETS THE HULK. There is little of actor Robbie Coltrane in the humongous character of Mr. Hyde. For that matter, Hyde might just as well be the Hunchback of Notre Dame, since that's where Van Helsing encounters him. It's a cartoon encounter, more Tex Avery than James Whale. Soon, we're deep into "butt-crack" gags and James Bondian music cues, and any thought of a genuine horror film flies out the window. The whole shebang goes rollicking along with senseless exposition and mindless special effects sequences that go on for what seems forever. Eventually, not even the cheesiness of it all is funny anymore.

With no script to speak of, the actors look lost in a project that really doesn't need them at all. Nothing is ever learned of Gabriel (not Abraham) Van Helsing's past except some hugger-mugger about "Masada" and his perhaps being "Gabriel, the Left Hand of God." Richard Roxburgh's Dracula (featuring perhaps the most annoying coiffure since Basil Rathbone's eccentric 'do in the Sherlock Holmes series) has some sort of plan for giving life to his bloodbag vampire babies, but whatever information he offers about them is lost in the actor's ranting, hothouse performance. There's no logic to many of the characters. We have an Igor (Kevin J. O'Connor) who is not a monster, but clearly not human, either. There are bunches of Victorian Ewoks running about for no apparent reason. There is an evocation of Warren Publications' Uncle Creepy called Top Hat (Tom Fisher)—who enables the vampires for no apparent reason. The Brides of Dracula (Elena Anaya, Sylvia Colloca, and Josie Maran) give birth to little gargoyles for no apparent reason. The Monster has what appears to be a Kryptonite heart, like Metallo. While Hensley is able to make

at least something of the Monster, he has no one with whom to connect. All the characters—including normal human beings—take falls that would kill normal human beings. VAN HELSING mounts up into a hodgepodge of cliché and meaningless action that finally stupefies.

So we wind up with a project that evokes the classic monsters but doesn't want to be a horror film—just another roller coaster ride for those who think such rides are all descent and no suspenseful buildup. It doesn't please the old fans and it doesn't encourage the new ones to be really frightened and enjoy what made these characters classic in the first place. It is that nonentity entertainment of the new millennium—a proposed franchise for product with no story to ignite the imagination, something to occupy the time, but not to thrill or frighten. It's the cinematic equivalent of a Chinese takeout dinner.

VAN HELSING has made enough money to perhaps warrant its sequel—though, mercifully, the TV series has been scrapped. Hopefully, Hugh Jackman will find better things to do instead.





TOP LEFT: Dr. Van Helsing (Peter Cushing) uses a crucifix to hold the vampirized Lucy (Carol Marsh) at bay in *HORROR OF DRACULA*, Hammer's first foray into Stoker territory. BELOW LEFT: By the time Van Helsing confronted Drac in *THE SATANIC RITES OF DRACULA*, he'd augmented the crucifix with a pistol. Hey, why takes chances?

VAN HELSING
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"Try and understand it's only a shell possessed and corrupted by the evil of Dracula. To liberate her soul and give her eternal peace, we must destroy that shell for all time. Believe me, there is no other way."

—HORROR
OF DRACULA
(1958)



The Studio That Dripped Blood first saw life in 1934 as Hammer Productions, one of many business interests of William Hinds,

known to British music hall patrons as Will Hammer. The first Hammer film—a parody of *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* (1933)—was the somewhat unimaginatively titled *THE PUBLIC LIFE OF HENRY THE NINTH* (1935), starring Leonard Henry. Hinds/Hammer soon joined forces with entrepreneur Enrique Carreras to create a film distribution company called Exclusive Films Limited, but Hammer Productions continued to churn out films, including *THE MYSTERY OF THE MARY CELESTE* (1935), a melodrama starring none other than Bela Lugosi. By the end of 1936, though, Hammer had ceased production and was absorbed by Exclusive.

James Carreras (Enrique's son) signed on with Exclusive in 1938 and was joined by Anthony Hinds (Will's son) the following year. James' son Michael was added to the mix in 1945, and Exclusive began producing its own films the following year. Hammer Productions—now called Hammer Film Productions Limited—was reborn in 1949. The company made a stab at Jack the Ripper with *ROOM TO LET* (1950), then joined the science-fiction bandwagon with *FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE* and *SPACEWAYS* (both 1953). The two sci-fiers were directed by Terence Fisher, soon to become a pivotal figure in the studio's success. Nevertheless, it was *THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT* (1955, aka *THE CREEPING UNKNOWN*) and *QUATERMASS 2* (1957, aka *ENEMY FROM SPACE*) that Hammered it home and led directly to *THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1957) and *HORROR OF DRACULA* (1958).

Hammer had looked to American stars for its early productions—Barbara Payton for *FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE*, Howard Duff for *SPACEWAYS*, and Brian Donlevy for the two Quatermass pictures. For its initial excursions into Gothic territory, however, it turned to British television.

"James Carreras thought, 'Now, if someone popular on television is in a film, we might be able to pull a few people into our seats,'" recalled Peter Cushing in a 1993 interview with *Scarlet Street*. "They had been on to my agent for many, many years to see if I would do a film, but I couldn't because I had to keep on doing

television; I couldn't do a film until a break came. And when the break came, I read in the trade paper that Hammer was going to do a remake of *FRANKENSTEIN*. I remembered, of course, seeing the original with Boris Karloff and Colin Clive, and I rang up my agent and said, 'Look, that was a jolly good film; do you think they'd consider me for *Frankenstein*?' And that's how that connection started. I did *THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* and it paid for itself within a week of its showing; all the profits of that went into making *DRACULA*, and that again made an enormous profit! So this snowball started to roll and roll and roll, and went on rolling for—what, 10 or 15 years? And Hammer became an internationally famous company, a multimillion-dollar company—and, of course, Christopher Lee and I were put on the map, both nationally and internationally!"

So successful was *THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* that American movie studios came running with offers to distribute new Hammer horrors in the States. Universal's deal was particularly attractive, giving Hammer the rights to their trademark characters of Kharis the Mummy, The Wolf Man, and Count Dracula. Kharis would make it to the screen in *THE MUMMY* (1959). The Wolf Man would step aside to make room for a film version of Guy Endore's novel *The Werewolf of Paris* (1934), retitled *THE CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF* (1961). The Vampire King beat them both to the screen and turned Hammer's Frankensteinian success into a phenomenon. All four productions—*FRANKENSTEIN*, *DRACULA*, *MUMMY*, *WEREWOLF*—were directed by Terence Fisher.

Before turning his hand to *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, Fisher had helmed a number of critically acclaimed films, including *THE ASTONISHED HEART* (1949) and *SO LONG AT THE FAIR* (1950), the former based on a Noel Coward play, the latter a Hitchcockian thriller based on a true story. The first Hammer Gothics set the tone for the remainder of Fisher's career, though, and when he died in 1980 at age 76 he had among his creepy credits *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* (1959), *THE MAN WHO COULD CHEAT DEATH* (1959), *THE BRIDES OF DRACULA* (1960), *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* (1962), *DRACULA—PRINCE OF DARKNESS* (1966), *THE DEVIL RIDES OUT* (1968), and *FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED* (1969). Fisher's directorial approach (layering his shots so that action occurred simultaneously at the points nearest to and farthest from the camera), coupled with the screenwriting skills of Jimmy Sangster, John Gilling, and Anthony Hinds (often credited as John Elder), virtually recreated the fright film and placed this small British company on an equal footing in horror history with Universal. Gone forever was the slow, stentorian pace of previous Draculas. Hammer's Vampire King had fangs and he knew how to use them.

"Hammer did it awfully well with *DRACULA*," opined Peter Cushing, "when Christopher Lee came on, the perfect gentleman, giving the chap dinner, and saying, 'If there's anything you want, let me know.' And then a few shots later, suddenly he appeared as one of the girls was having a go at John Van Eyssen, and old Dracula came in and was rather cross. He was quite terrifying, the way he came in there like a steam train. Christopher gave it such a physical presence, yes? A physical presence which was attractive

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Van Helsing's One and Two

For me there was really only one Van Helsing and that was dear old Edward Van Sloan, whom I met in his small apartment in San Francisco in the last days of his life.

He could not understand why everyone seemed to remember him only for his roles in DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN. He told me he'd had leading roles in scores of hits on the Broadway stage, but people seemed to only want to talk to him about Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. They wanted him to appear on television, but though the TV station was only a block away, the dear man was not capable of walking even that short distance.

These days at conventions I reenact a scene from FRANKENSTEIN, myself playing the part of Colin Clive and I invite someone from the audience, preferably a real live doctor, to portray Edward Van Sloan as Dr. Waldman. The fan from the audience speaks Van Sloan's immortal line of dialogue, "And you really believe you can bring life to the dead?"

As for the other Van Helsing, Peter Cushing, I was on television with him one night in New York until 2:30 in the morning. On the TOMORROW show with Tom Snyder, he reminisced about his role in the Hammer Dracula films, among other things. Like Karloff, he didn't object at all to being typecast in a role that made him famous.

I imagine the two Van Helsing in the Great Beyond are looking down with interest on their latest filmic incarnation—Hugh Jackman.

Getting Around

I have been very busy recently with a reunion with Ray Bradbury and Ray Harryhausen at Clifton's cafeteria in LA, where in 1937 we first met and attended the weekly meetings of what originally was known as Chapter #4 of the Science Fiction League. Today, some 3,000 meetings later, the weekly meetings continue with a group that morphed into the Los Angeles

Science Fantasy Society. I have done my 105th and 106th movie cameo—respectively in SPACE NINJA, in which I play a high-powered evil executive (emoting against my first "green-screen"), and in SERGE OF POWER, in which I am seen as an unfortunate pedestrian on a sidewalk, who falls afoul of the leading comic book-type character.

I was fortunate to be present opening night to see Ray Bradbury's new play adapted from his work LET'S ALL KILL CONSTANCE, sitting in the front row with playwright Bradbury and our mutual buddy, animator Ray Harryhausen. The production, by far the best of Bradbury's plays to date, features none other than the Tall Man—Angus Scrimm, star of the PHANTASM series.

I was present at a Dark Delicacies book signing event for Ray Harryhausen and his fabulous new book, *An Animated Life*. Wow! Just back from Las Vegas (haven't been

there since my cameo in VAMPIRELLA a number of years ago). Was invited to see *Famous Monsters of Filmland* fans Penn & Teller at their terrific show in the Samba Room at the Rio Casino. Went backstage and was invited to Penn's famous and weird house, where a handful of us were treated to a rough-cut of a hilarious new documentary that Penn is producing, called THE ARISTOCRATS. In it, every comedian known to humanity talks about and tells the single vilest, raunchiest, most offensive joke ever delivered. I got a laugh myself when, as the credits rolled, I asked if Penn would consider me when casting the sequel! Could it be Cameo #107?

At the June Monster Bash in Butler, Pennsylvania, I gave *Scarlet Street* a hand—literally. I presented Richard Valley and Tom Amorosi with one of the 2003 4E Awards—a recreation of my hand wearing the original Dracula ring—but that's a story for next issue.



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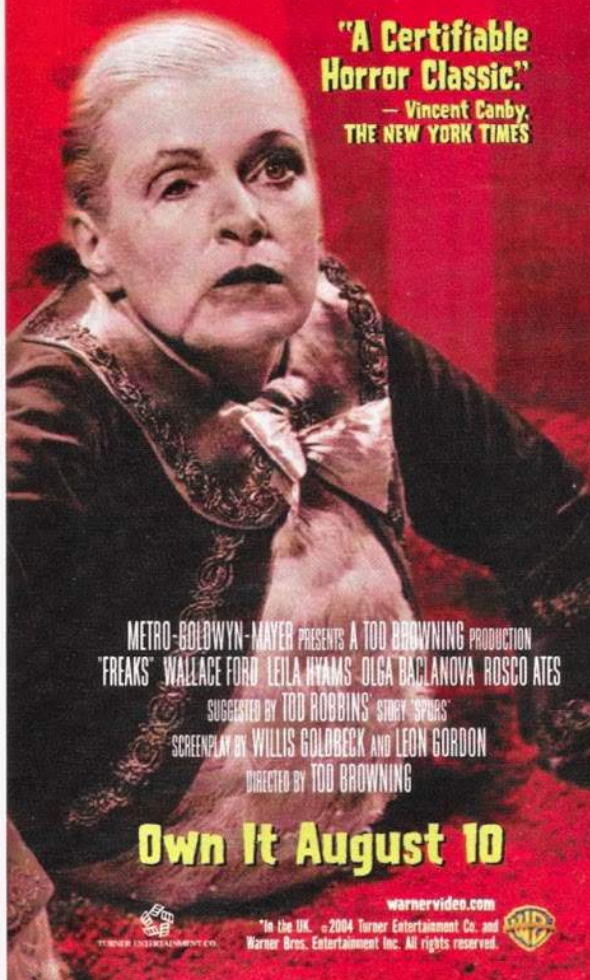


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DRIVE-IN COMBO #116

(DVD item #DI-116D, VHS item #DI-116)*
WEREWOLF OF WASHINGTON (1973) Dean Stockwell, Biff McGuire, Jane House, Michael Dunn. An old fashioned, schlocky grade B werewolf movie! The President's press secretary (Stockwell) is on a trip through Hungary when he's bitten by a werewolf. He goes back to D.C. and wreaks havoc in the nation's capital. One terrific scene has him attacking a woman in an overturned phone booth. Another scene has him locking himself in a White House bathroom to keep away from the President's daughter while he's transforming. The climax is great! This enjoyable chiller really pays homage to *The Wolf Man*. "Whoever is bitten by a werewolf and lives, becomes a werewolf himself." Stockwell sees the sign of the pentagram in the palms of his soon-to-be victims. The makeup and transformation scenes are quite good. Color, 16mm.

THE CREMATORS (1972) Marvin Howard, Maria Di Aragon, Eric Alison. A scientist doing research near a remote part of the Great Lakes region discovers a series of bizarre droplets that seem to have a life of their own and are in some way connected to a gigantic energy monster that lurks in the waters below. Soon bodies are found that have been incinerated into neat piles of ashes. Color, 16mm. \$228

DRIVE-IN COMBO #117

(DVD item #DI-117D, VHS item #DI-117)*
HERCULES AND THE PRINCESS OF TROY (1965) Gordon Scott, Paul Stevens. One of the best spectacle films we offer--really. Scott is very good as Hercules in this wonderful color fantasy. A giant sea dragon must be fed a beautiful female virgin from time to time, otherwise it will wreak havoc upon an ancient Greek city. When the local warriors are unable to kill the beast, Hercules steps up to the plate. Originally intended as a TV pilot, but syndicated as a short feature instead. Color, 16mm.

FURY OF ACHILLES (1962) Gordon Mitchell, Jacques Bergerac, Gloria Milland. The epic story of Troy. Achilles, who initially resists the idea of leading an attack on the fortified city, eventually leads the Greeks to victory over the embattled Trojans. This is a fine retelling of the legendary story with many great action scenes. Mitchell is especially good in what may well be his best film. Recommended. Color, from 16mm.

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SCREAM OF THE DEMON LOVER (1971) Jeffrey Chase, Jennifer Harvey, Agostino Belli. A hideously disfigured killer (who gets uglier every full moon) terrorizes a village. Meanwhile, a beautiful woman and a strange baron conduct experiments to show that matter can never be destroyed. What's the connection? A fine, often neglected European chiller that you'll watch more than once. Uncut, rated "R." Color, 16mm.

DR. ORLOF'S INVISIBLE HORROR (1970) Howard Vernon, Brigitte Carva, Fernando Sancho. Directed by Jess Franco. A young doctor arrives at the castle of Dr. Orlof. He encounters a deranged woman who claims to be terrorized by an invisible ape. Is she really deranged, though? Be advised: this Euro-chiller has a lot of nudity, plus a rape scene involving the invisible ape. Quite atmospheric. Color, 35mm.



DRIVE-IN COMBO #119

(DVD item #DI-119D, VHS item #DI-119)*
THE RISK (1959) Peter Cushing, Tony Britton, Thorley Walters, Donald Pleasence, Ian Bannen. *The Risk* is a great movie, a fine blend of medical sci-fi and espionage. Cushing heads a research lab that has created a new super virus that cures bubonic plague. Unfortunately, the government feels it could be used as a horrible germ-warfare weapon. Cushing and his staff are outraged when British Intelligence forbids them to publish their work. Will they publish anyway, or give it to another government? This great thriller has fine performances. Walters is great as the bumbling, yet sly head of British Intelligence. Pleasence is the seedy go-between who lures scientist Britton into handing over the secrets of the virus to another power; and Bannen is terrific as the paraplegic who arranges the exchange. A memorable film. Highly recommended. 16mm.

ESCAPEMENT (1957) Rod Cameron, Mary Murphy, Meredith Edwards, Peter Illing. A mad scientist conducts weird experiments on people with a mind altering, electronic brain machine. Terrific dream sequences are the highlight of this British sci-fi movie. There are also some very unusual lab scenes. Interesting sci-fi. 16mm.

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JOURNEY TO THE LOST CITY

IN COLORSCOPE



DRIVE-IN COMBO #120

(DVD item #DI-120D, VHS item #DI-120)*
JOURNEY TO THE LOST CITY (1958) Debra Paget, Paul Christian, Walter Reyer, directed by Fritz Lang. Debra is an exotic dancer, coveted by an evil maharajah. A daring adventurer rescues her. They face many perils, including snakes, tigers, lepers, and elephants. An interesting adventure thriller from master director Lang. Debra's erotic dancing is quite enticing. Recommended. Color, 16mm.

BLACK SUNDAY (1960) Barbara Steele, John Richardson. Considered by many to be one of the greatest horror films ever made. An ancient witch and her hideous servant come back from the grave to fulfill an ancient curse. Highly atmospheric. This film launched Steele as a horror star. PLEASE NOTE: Our edition is the British version that contains additional footage, a different voice and effects track, and boasts the original Italian music score. Highly recommended. 16mm.

DRIVE-IN COMBO #121

(DVD item #DI-121D, VHS item #DI-121)*

THE MUMMY'S REVENGE (1973) Paul Naschy, Jack Taylor, Maria Silva, Helga Line. An evil pharaoh and his queen slash the throats of young girls and drink their blood. They are mummified alive for their grisly crimes. Years later, a scientist disturbs their tomb. Chills soon follow! Paul really got wrapped up in his performance in this film. Color, 16mm.

VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES (1972) Paul Naschy, Vic Winner. This is one of the more graphic and brutal of the Paul Naschy films to come out of the '70s. A British woman has nightmares in which she sees her friends horribly murdered. Soon it begins to happen in real life. She discovers her family inherited an ancient curse. Featured are all kinds of weird and gruesome zombies and zombie rites. Color, from 16mm.

DRIVE-IN COMBO #122

(DVD item #DI-122D, VHS item #DI-122)*

BELL FROM HELL (1970) Viveca Lindfors, Renaud Verley, Alfredo Mayo. After being locked away for years, a man comes back to seek his bizarre revenge on his aunt and her three daughters who had him falsely institutionalized as a psycho. He begins to play macabre jokes on them. Things go awry though, when the man ends up being tied by the neck to a bell tower rope. After the inaugural ring of the bell the next day, things take a horrific turn for the worse. This is a quality Euro-horror chiller that all fans of the sub-genre are going to want to see. Color, 16mm.

MURDER MANSION (1972) Andre Resino, Analia Gade, Evelyn Stewart. A young couple, lost in the fog, stumble upon an eerie cemetery next to a sinister mansion. They enter only to face unspeakable horrors! For all Euro-horror fans. Color, From 16mm. H187



This Rebel Breed



DRIVE-IN COMBO #123

(DVD item #DI-123D, VHS item #DI-123)*

THIS REBEL BREED (1959 aka **BLACK REBELS**) Rita Moreno, Mark Damon, Gerald Mohr, Dyan Cannon. Damon's in blackface as blacks take on whites and whites take on Hispanics in this very entertaining teenage gang war extravaganza. Teenage punks slice and dice each other, turn innocent young girls into sleazy tramps, threaten innocent citizens, get involved in interracial romance, and sell drugs to local citizens. Whew! That's a lotta trashy behavior for one movie. Regardless, the result is a very entertaining JD mini-classic that will hold your interest. Moreno's next film, *West Side Story*, landed her an Oscar. Recommended. 35mm.

THE REBEL SET (1959) Gregg Palmer, Edward Platt, Don Sullivan. Interesting beatnik film that shows the atmosphere and flavor of the late '50s beatnik clubs. It also features an intricately planned robbery scheme. Better than a lot of the other JD stuff that was coming out around the same time. Platt is great as the intellectual ringleader. 16mm.

DRIVE-IN COMBO #124

(DVD item #DI-124D, VHS item #DI-124)*

CURSE OF THE SWAMP CREATURE (1968) John Agar, Jeff Alexander, Francine York. Another great bad movie from the 1960s. A mad doctor creates big, hulking reptile monsters at his secret lab in the Everglades. Using local natives for his experiments, his creations walk around with goofy fangs and ping-pong ball eyes—really goofy. Yet, *Curse of the Swamp Creature* has many of the usual horror/sci-fi elements that so many of us baby-boomers love. Color, from 16mm.

IT'S ALIVE (1968) Tommy Kirk, Shirley Bonne, Bill Thurman. A real gagster that's so much fun to watch. A maniacal farmer kidnaps local passersby and feeds them to his cave-dwelling lizard man that lives in a cave beneath his farm. The ping pong ball-eyed monster is a scream. Amazing. One of the best of the bad. From 16mm.

DRIVE-IN COMBO #125

(DVD item #DI-125D, VHS item #DI-125)*

LIGHTNING BOLT (1965) Anthony Eisley, Diana Lorys. A secret agent goes after a madman who deflects moon rockets by blasting them out of the sky with super-powered laser beams. Yikes! Much in the spirit of James Bond with a nice blend of science fiction excitement and espionage thrills. Recommended for sure. Color, 16mm.

RED DRAGON (1967) Stewart Granger, Rosanna Schiaffino, Horst Frank. Secret agents in Hong Kong try to crack a notorious smuggling ring. This was a fairly big budget thriller for its kind of foreign spy stuff, and it shows. Granger looks great and gives a fine performance. Cool locations. Overall a pretty good spy thriller. From a nice Technicolor 35mm print.



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MARS ATTACKS THE WORLD (1938) Buster Crabbe, Jean Rogers, Charles Middleton. 16mm. VHS item #S245, DVD item #S245D

MANHUNT IN SPACE* (1953) Richard Crane, Sally Mansfield, Scotty Beckett. From 16mm. VHS item #S029, DVD item #S029D

SILVER NEEDLE IN THE SKY* (1953) Richard Crane, Sally Mansfield. From 16mm. VHS item #S031, DVD item #S031D

ATOMIC RULERS OF THE WORLD* (1957) Ken Utsui, Junko Ikeuchi, Minoru Takada. 16mm. DVD item #S217D, VHS item #S217

THE UNKNOWN TERROR* (1957) John Howard, Paul Richards, Mala Powers. 16mm. DVD item #H246D, VHS item #H246

RETURN OF DR. MABUSE* (1961) Lex Barker, Gerte Frobe, Wolfgang Preis. 16mm. DVD item #S143D, VHS item #S143

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THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE* (1967) Grant Williams, Mala Powers, Henry Wilcoxon. Color, 16mm. DVD item #S190D, VHS item #S190

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HOUSE OF DARKNESS* (1948) Laurence Harvey, Leslie Brooks, John Stuart. 16mm. DVD item #H203D, VHS item #H203

ALIAS JOHN PRESTON (1956) Christopher Lee, Bette St. John, Alexander Knox. 35mm. DVD item #H102D, VHS item #H102

FROM HELL IT CAME (1957) Tod Andrews, Tina Carver, Lida Watkins, Gregg Palmer. 16mm. DVD item #H326D, VHS item #H326

THE DEAD TALK BACK* (1957) Aldo Famese, Scott Douglas, Laura Brock. From 35mm. DVD item #H192D, VHS item #H192

FACE OF TERROR (1959) Liza Gage, Fernando Rey, Gerard Tichy. 35mm. DVD item #H204D, VHS item #H204

FOUR SKULLS OF JONATHAN DRAKE (1959) Henry Daniell, Edward Franz, Valerie French. DVD item #H326D, VHS item #H326

HANDS OF ORLAC* (1960) Mel Ferrer, Christopher Lee, Donald Wolff, Dany Carrel. 16mm. DVD item #H147D, VHS item #H147

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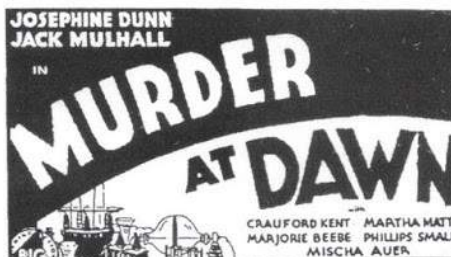
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Formerly Kay Linaker

Kate Phillips remembers
Charlie Chan, the Blob,
and the men who directed
FRANKENSTEIN and DRACULA.

Part Two
of an Exclusive Interview
by Leonard J. Kohl

would be a bastard. And from that point on, through his entire career, he was a bastard! And he made a good thing of it.

SS: So James Whale was pleasant in comparison. Under favorable circumstances, what was his style of direction?

KP: He was remote. If you wanted to know how he wanted a scene played, you were wise to talk it over before you started shooting. On GREEN HELL, everybody got together and told Whale what a wonderful script it was, and they all took advantage of him. He was out of it! He was starting to go out of it, but he wasn't nasty. Everybody told Whale how good it was—"Oh, yes, isn't this nice? Isn't this wonderful!" They all played it for fun and games. It was a big spoof!

SS: And apparently, Whale didn't get the joke?

KP: No, he didn't. He didn't get the joke at all. When it came out, I was left with one scene in the picture! When they're getting ready to go into the jungle, George Sanders sees me in a bar and we make a date. It's surprising that they got it past the Hays Office, because he quite definitely picks me up, and you know exactly what we're gonna do! Following that, I went on safari with them, and George and I were supposed to be together—but you never see me again in the picture! All the weeks we sloshed through the mud and all the muck that we went through—it was cut!

SS: What do you think was wrong with Whale, exactly?

KP: Well, I think he had a breakdown—a serious, serious breakdown. GREEN HELL was made when he was in the process of being away from reality. And then the next thing he did, THEY DARE NOT LOVE—I think he had gone over the border, and he really belonged in a locked ward.

SS: Like Tod Browning, not much has really been known about James Whale's private life.

KP: Well, you see, Tod was 100% male, and James Whale was gay. And that's something that nobody took into consideration. Now, he wouldn't have any trouble...

SS: Back then, though, it was considered necessary to keep it a secret from the public.

KP: Oh, of course! Several directors were gay, but they knew how to handle it. There were several very successful ones who never had a breakdown, who even went through the business of being married to a woman. They were such nice guys—such really good guys, and so talented that everybody worked with them and loved them dearly.

SS: But James Whale couldn't handle it?

KP: Oh, no! He was mad! Believe me! Insane! That was the great tragedy, because he was a sick man. He was a very, very sick man! None of us who worked with him hated him. We were all very sorry for him, but we weren't about to set ourselves up and be clay pigeons. That's why Martha's husband

went to Harry Cohn about him. It wasn't done to embarrass Whale, but he saw to it that we didn't suffer for it. I have never seen that picture. I don't know if it was even released!

SS: Is there anything more you can tell us about GREEN HELL?

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SS: Was Whale's homosexuality well known in the film industry or was it a guarded secret?

KP: Well, nobody paid any attention to anybody's private business at that time. What we were up against was a man who was having a nervous breakdown and who was lashing out at the whole world.

SS: Did Whale's lover, David Lewis, ever show up on the set?

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SS: So they kept a low profile. How much of THEY DARE NOT LOVE did Whale shoot before he was fired?

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the phone—he could pick up a phone and speak to everybody on the lot; everybody's phones rang when he picked up this particular one—and he said, "Now get this! No lady wears diamonds before five o'clock in the afternoon except for her engagement ring!" And nobody ever did. It was the order from Harry Cohn! (Laughs)

SS: And you gave the order to Harry Cohn! Let's backtrack. How did you get started in show business?

KP: I started when I was, oh, six or seven. I was an only child and I played imaginary games. The very first thing I remember is traveling with my mother and father and my nurse to Chicago. My father took us on all his business trips. One evening in Chicago—I was about a year and a half—we went

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SS: You remembered this at that age?

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Kate Phillips—the former Broadway and Hollywood actress known as Kay Linaker—may look like someone's kindly, white-haired grandmother, but when you see the fire in her eyes (a nice, warm fire, but a fire, nonetheless), you realize she's someone special. That's not just because Kate worked with some of the truly great directors, actors, and actresses of Hollywood's Golden Age, but because she did more than merely bask in that rarified glory.

Today, at 91 years of age, Kate Phillips is dedicated to giving college students some of the gifts she got as an actress. With more energy than people half her age, she teaches hopeful actors, actresses, and writers some of the tricks of the trade that she was fortunate to learn from a nearly 70-year career on Broadway and in Hollywood as an actress and writer.

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Kate Phillips: Well, when we made GREEN HELL in 1940, he wasn't nasty. Of course, anybody else would have looked good, because we had George Sanders in that! (Laughs) He was just unbelievable! In the first film he did—LLOYDS OF LONDON—George Sanders played a bastard. And he did such a good job with it, and he got such good notices, that he decided he

Formerly Kay Linaker

Kate Phillips remembers
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and the men who directed
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of an Exclusive Interview
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would be a bastard. And from that point on, through his entire career, he was a bastard! And he made a good thing of it.

SS: So James Whale was pleasant in comparison. Under favorable circumstances, what was his style of direction?

KP: He was remote. If you wanted to know how he wanted a scene played, you were wise to talk it over before you started shooting. On *GREEN HELL*, everybody got together and told Whale what a wonderful script it was, and they all took advantage of him. He was out of it! He was starting to go out of it, but he wasn't nasty. Everybody told Whale how good it was—"Oh, yes, isn't this nice? Isn't this wonderful!" They all played it for fun and games. It was a big spoof!

SS: And apparently, Whale didn't get the joke?

KP: No, he didn't. He didn't get the joke at all. When it came out, I was left with one scene in the picture! When they're getting ready to go into the jungle, George Sanders sees me in a bar and we make a date. It's surprising that they got it past the Hays Office, because he quite definitely picks me up, and you know exactly what we're gonna do! Following that, I went on safari with them, and George and I were supposed to be together—but you never see me again in the picture! All the weeks we sloshed through the mud and all the muck that we went through—it was cut!

SS: What do you think was wrong with Whale, exactly?

KP: Well, I think he had a breakdown—a serious, serious breakdown. *GREEN HELL* was made when he was in the process of being away from reality. And then the next thing he did, *THEY DARE NOT LOVE*—I think he had gone over the border, and he really belonged in a locked ward.

SS: Like Tod Browning, not much has really been known about James Whale's private life.

KP: Well, you see, Tod was 100% male, and James Whale was gay. And that's something that nobody took into consideration. Now, he wouldn't have any trouble...

SS: Back then, though, it was considered necessary to keep it a secret from the public.

KP: Oh, of course! Several directors were gay, but they knew how to handle it. There were several very successful ones who never had a breakdown, who even went through the business of being married to a woman. They were such nice guys—such really good guys, and so talented that everybody worked with them and loved them dearly.

SS: But James Whale couldn't handle it?

KP: Oh, no! He was mad! Believe me! Insane! That was the great tragedy, because he was a sick man. He was a very, very sick man! None of us who worked with him hated him. We were all very sorry for him, but we weren't about to set ourselves up and be clay pigeons. That's why Martha's husband

went to Harry Cohn about him. It wasn't done to embarrass Whale, but he saw to it that we didn't suffer for it. I have never seen that picture. I don't know if it was even released!

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SS: *Did Whale's lover, David Lewis, ever show up on the set?*

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SS: *And you gave the order to Harry Cohn! Let's backtrack. How did you get started in show business?*

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SS: *What other training did you have?*

KP: There was a place in New York State called Chautaugua Lake. My father had heard about Chautaugua Institution, so he bought a house there and we spent our summers at Chautaugua.



LEFT: Kay Linaker appeared in this party scene from *LAURA* (1944), directed by Rouben Mamoulian before he was replaced by Otto Preminger. In the foreground are Vincent Price, Judith Anderson, and Dana Andrews. Linaker can be spied behind Anderson's left shoulder. **RIGHT:** Clifton Webb and Gene Tierney watch as Dana Andrews engages in Price gouging.

Our next door neighbor was a very interesting gentleman. One day, I crawled through a hedge and on the other side—his side—there was a bush that had the most interesting fruit on it. I tried to reach one, and this voice said, "I'll take care of it for you!" I turned around and there stood a white-haired gentleman. He picked it and said, "Do you know what this is? It's a gooseberry." I said, "What's a gooseberry?" and he said, "Turn your head and look at me when you talk; I'm deaf." And that was my introduction to Thomas Edison! He was my neighbor all during my youth; we went up to Chautaugua every summer. Mr. Tom and I had great fun. He loved to tell jokes and, even if I didn't understand the joke, when he began to grin I'd start to laugh. I was a great audience for him and we did all kinds of things together. When his friends came, he said, "You be sure to come through the hedge, because I want you to meet these people; they're nice men." One was Henry Ford and the other was named Firestone.

SS: That's right; they'd go off on camping trips together.

KP: John Phillip Sousa came, too; his band came to Chautaugua and I wanted to get his autograph. I told Mr. Tom that I wasn't going to be able to be able to play Parcheesi, because I had to go down to the amphitheater to try to get Mr. Sousa's autograph. Mr. Tom said, "I'll come with you; I want his autograph, too." So we went down to the amphitheater and, of course, we got John Phillip Sousa's autograph. And then Mr. Sousa asked for Mr. Tom's autograph, and that was the first time I realized ...

SS: That this man was somebody.

KP: ... that this man was really amazing!

SS: You lost your father at a very early age, didn't you?

KP: My father died in my arms when I was 11. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage. He was not yet 41 years old. He was leaning against me; he thought he had indigestion. I got him a drink and

stopped at the telephone on the way back, and the operator answered and I said, "This is Mary Katherine Linaker and my daddy's very sick. Get the doctors!" And she did. I started to put a cup to my father's mouth and he looked up at me and the most beautiful expression came over his face. And I knew he was dead. The doctors came and lifted my father off my lap and put him on the floor. They started working on him. The pulmonary man arrived with the machine and I just sat there. Nobody paid any attention to me! I got up and walked out of the room. I walked through the house and sat down on the back step. I remember thinking my father's dead, but he's not gone. He'll always be near me, and I couldn't cry. Roxy was the cook, and she went upstairs to take care of my mother. Emma, the maid, came down and put her arms around me. She said, "I don't have to tell you what's happened. Just go ahead and cry; it's all right to cry." She put her arms around me and rocked me back and forth, and all of a sudden I was able to cry.

SS: Did your father's sudden death change your life drastically?

KP: Well, my parents had planned that I'd go to boarding school, according to British custom. I took an active part in the drama, but during my last year of boarding school I caught polio. The doctor said, "The usual method of treatment is immobilization, but I've never seen it work. However, there's a nurse in Australia starting a new method called the Sister Kenny treatment. It has to do with revitalizing the muscles and nerves through a series of exercise and water treatment." Mother said, "Well, if you know something doesn't work, it's worth trying something that might." So I had the Sister Kenny treatment. My schoolmates carried me from class to class; I was never in a wheelchair. I was carried by my schoolmates and then I walked, leaning on them. I was able to walk in the

Commencement procession holding on to my two roommates. I was supposed to go to Wellesley, but I had started the exercise treatments with a modern dancer named Phoebe Guthrie, who was at Chautaugua that summer. I decided I'd have to keep on with Phoebe and she was in New York, so I wrote to Wellesley and regretted that I'd be unable to come. New York University had a small campus in Washington Square, and that's where I started my college.

SS: Did you study drama there?

KP: Well, at Chautaugua, I had met Edna Ferber's niece, who was going to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I saw how the Academy worked and announced to my mother that I wanted to go. Mother said, "That's fine, but you have to get an academic degree, too, because theater is a very iffy business." So the next year I doubled up on my classes and took summer courses, because New York University had an extension at Chautaugua. I came back and enrolled in the American Academy.

SS: You can't ask for better training than that! In the early thirties, Warner Bros. was grooming you for stardom. Why didn't you stay with the studio?

KP: Mary Astor came on the set of my second picture, *ROAD GANG*, and went to the rushes with me. She said, "Kay, I've got a proposition for you. Ask for your release, now, before this picture is over." I was the only woman in the picture, and Mary thought I was going to make a splash and be in a better bargaining position if I was a free-lancer. She said, "If you don't ask for your release, you're gonna be stuck. Every single solitary part for a brunette that comes down the line will be offered to Kay Francis, Mary Astor, and Margaret Lindsay, and all three of us have to turn it down before you get a chance at it. If you don't believe it, just realize what happened when Jimmy Cagney wanted you as his leading lady. You

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Twilight of the Horror Gods: Inside the Kate Phillips Interview

by Ken Hanke

Scarlet Street's Kate Phillips interview (begun in SS #50 and concluded in this issue), conducted by Leonard J. Kohl, is certainly of more than passing interest to fans of Tod Browning and James Whale, the most famous horror film directors of the 1920s and 1930s. Phillips' revelations offer a very different take than we've previously had on what happened with these prime architects of the horror film, and what ended their careers so prematurely.

It's always been convenient to blame the demise of Browning's career on the aftershock of *FREAKS* (1932) and Browning's drinking, and now we find very contrary evidence. The stories of the director's alcoholism may well have been fueled by Browning himself, who once admitted to trying to drink up all the liquor in the world. Even though he was referring to a time in the Roaring Twenties, his remarks may have colored perceptions about what happened later, much of which has never been more than supposition.

Kate Phillips' version of the events leading to Tod Browning's retirement make sense out of those years, while at the same time seriously skewing a lot of things we thought we knew. That Louis B. Mayer wanted Browning back on the payroll as the studio's horror expert seems perfectly reasonable. After all, Browning had been MGM's specialist in the macabre in the twenties. What more reasonable business decision than to lure him back from Universal after the success of *DRACULA* (1931)? That Browning wanted to make other kinds of movies is evidenced by following *FREAKS* with *FAST WORKERS* (1933), a fright-free drama about hardhats. Phillips interview reveals why there are so few Browning films after *FREAKS*—as well as why there's a three-year gap between *THE DEVIL DOLL* (1936) and Browning's last picture, the underrated *MIRACLES FOR SALE* (1939). Obviously, the studio considered him a horror specialist and wasn't willing to let him branch out, and Browning would have fallen prey to the 1936-39 moratorium on horror movies.

Kate Phillips' revelations about James Whale are no less illuminating. The notion that Whale was quietly eased out because he was too open about his homosexuality has always been questionable. It's likelier that he had more to do with two factors—that he was a very specialized talent only able to completely function under the director-friendly regime of the Laemmles, and that, by the time of his retirement, he'd said all he had to say in the medium. Phillips' reminiscences bear out those long-ago remarks of Elsa Lanchester's about Whale being bitter and tragic. The interview also squares with such "eccentricities" as Whale wearing a German army uniform while making *THE ROAD BACK* (1937).

Observations by others of Whale's behavior on movie sets support Kate Phillips' remarks. Consider the comments made by Louis Hayward about Whale's attitude toward him during the making of *THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK* (1939)—and toward the film itself. The idea of a director sitting directly beneath the camera and casu-

ally smoking during the takes, happily oblivious to the fact that the smoke might be seen in the film, suggests one of two things: either Whale was hoping to get fired or, at that point in his life, he was retreating into a world of his own. In light of Phillips' comments about Whale not understanding how campily bad the *GREEN HELL* (1940) script was, it's hard not to subscribe to the latter view. That a man who had previously evidenced such a wicked and sharp sense of humor could miss such absurdities is hard to imagine. Phillips' comments about what happened on the set of *THEY DARE NOT LOVE* (1941) pretty much settles it. For years, we've been lead to assume that Whale was badgered by George Brent on this film—badgered because of his sexuality. In retrospect, it's amazing that anyone accepted this as fact. Has anyone ever heard reports of Brent giving the also-gay director Edmund Goulding any trouble? Brent worked with Goulding around the same time. And did Brent make life miserable for gay actor Richard Cromwell, with whom he had shared most of his scenes in *JEZEBEL* (1938)? If so, nothing has ever been said about it.

According to Kate Phillips, James Whale was falling apart because he was trying to keep his gayness under wraps. Granted that Phillips' attitude toward homosexuality is very much of her generation and may color her perceptions (the heterosexual Browning was "all man," the gay Whale presumably a lower percentage), this isn't surprising. Most of the previous info we have on Whale's last years of filmmaking came from the director's lover of 20 years, producer David Lewis, and were committed to print by Whale biographer James Curtis. Consider: Lewis is the man who asked Curtis not to make a big issue of Whale's sexuality in his book. Lewis has always been presented as someone concerned about "keeping up appearances." And this is the same David Lewis who suppressed Whale's suicide note for 25 years. It's hard to dismiss the probability that Lewis would also try his damndest to keep any suggestion of actual mental illness out of an account of Whale's life. Curtis' two Whale biographies contain a few tanta-

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LOVE
THAT

BLOB



THE SELF-ABSORPTION OF AMERICA

by Erich Kuersten



A meteor has crashed to Earth—and it contains a passenger soon to gain fame as *THE BLOB* (1958). A gang of overage teenagers (including Aneta Corsaut and Steve McQueen) examines the well-traveled rock.

"The audience . . . may also have felt threatened as consumers . . . as they watched the hungry mass—comparable if not incarnating the growing consumerism of 1950s America—devour their kind"

—Bruce Kavin, liner notes for *THE BLOB* (The Criterion Collection)

Why do we love the Blob, that amorphous space amoeba who soaks up people with such poker-faced enthusiasm? Is it the same reason we love fast food? The first *BLOB* came out in 1958, the zenith of the sci-fi boom of that era and three years after Ray Kroc opened the first McDonalds. Scripted by actress Kate Phillips (her sole screenwriting credit) and directed by Irwin S. Yeaworth, Jr., *THE BLOB* instantly stands out from its contemporaries, not only for the presence of Steve (billed as Steven) McQueen and the fact that it's in color (a relative rarity for independent sci-fi at the time), but for its dreamlike realization of small-town American life. There is real character development where one usually finds two-dimensional monster food; monotonal scientists and adenoidal delinquents are replaced by genuine people—particularly Steve Andrews (McQueen). A complex character not unlike James Dean's Jim Stark in *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* (1955), Steve believably "grows up" during the course of the film, from a teen masking his fear with bravado to a genuine day-saving hero. The film breaks free of types and suggests

there were opportunities for rebels to find social causes and actually become leaders. The late fifties were, after all, a time when fast food and mall culture were still just ideas in the minds of crackpot businessmen; the blob of amok consumerism was still a little embryo on a stick. The youth of the Eisenhower Era had the chance to be recognized as potential leaders of tomorrow rather than as the gullible, gobbled-up marketing target of today.

Back in 1958, reality wasn't fully nailed down to the franchise or genre expectations. Most striking, from the first frames of the original *BLOB*, is its poetic, dreamlike tone. It opens with no background other than the starless black sky, no long shots establishing the location—just an unnerving closeup of Steve staring romantically into the camera. The zingy credit sequence that has come previously to this jarring moment, of animated lines squiggling closer and closer, coupled with the loungey title song by Burt Bacharach and Mack David, has already worked against establishing any kind of menacing mood, so this opening shot, which puts the viewer in the middle of an intimate embrace, sets us off-kilter. Then Steve's off-camera girlfriend, Jane Martin (Aneta Corsaut), speaks to him and things get weirder. Her voice seems to be coming in from somewhere out in far left field, a distant dream voiceover. Steve, meanwhile, stares past Jane's head—right past the camera, in fact—so we can't help but feel that he is "putting the moves on us," acting for us. Since it's a teenager "act" he's doing, he puts us in the authority position. He be-



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"My name's not Janey Baby; it's Jane... just Jane," Jane says. Even at the start of the film, she's trying to peel away his layers of "absorbed" behavior. The importance of her name is that it makes her real as a person—and at this juncture, Steve has problems with reality.

Steve and Jane drive around and try to find the meteor, but are unable to do so. Meanwhile, an old coot (Olin Howlin) finds it, pokes it with a stick, and gets a bit of gooey dreck on his hand as a result. Driving back to town, Steve and Jane find him by the side of the road and take him to see Dr. Hallen (Steven Chase). The doc sends the two teens out to look for the relatives of the old man. While they're gone, the thing on the old man's hand consumes him and then turns and devours Doc Hallen and his nurse, Kate (Lee Payton). Returning, Steve witnesses the Blob's attack on the medical profession, but when he goes to the cops—the sympathetic Lieutenant Dave (Earl Rowe) and the antagonistic Officer Ritchie (George Karas)—they don't believe him. Worse, they can find no evidence at the scene of the crime. The law calls the teenagers' parents (Hugh Graham as Mr. Andrews, and Elbert Smith and Audrey Metcalf as Henry and Elizabeth Martin), who take them home to bed. Certain that a life-threatening alien is on the loose, Steve and Jane sneak out of their respective houses and find their friends, who are attending an all-night spook show (Bela Lugosi in *DAUGHTER OF HORROR*) at the local theater.



At Steve's urging, the teens try to warn the townspeople. Patrolling the town, Steve and Jane notice that his dad's grocery store is unlocked. When they enter to investigate, the Blob traps them in the meat freezer. They escape and pull all the alarms to wake the sleeping townspeople. Everyone gathers at the store, but the Blob has taken a powder and—again—no one believes them. Just when it looks like Steve is in big trouble, the alien life form infiltrates the movie theater, gobbles up the projectionist, and tries to find a good seat in the balcony. The audience runs out of the theater screaming (actually, several of the local extras run out of the theater laughing), validating Steve's story.

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In the fifties, such corporate homogenization was still a relative novelty. In today's suburban-sprawl nation, it's hard to imagine that there was once a time when the same five fast food and hotel chains weren't at every damned exit on any damned highway. (Even highways were new.) Now, a Starbucks Coffee lies swallowed inside a monolithic Barnes & Noble inside a giant mall. The local prefab cineplex plays the same bland Jim Carrey movie in half of its 21 theaters. The teen of old had the leather-jacketed James Deans and Elvises to emulate, but had only glimpses of them on *THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW* or when the right movie came to town; there was still a chance to be oneself, and people bored enough to listen. Such an audience and position is harder in the MTV age of today, where one literally cannot escape Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake saturation bombing. There's no real rebellious nature in the MTV-weaned teenagers of today, no ability to shed the layers of personae. They learn the mannerisms of the singer du jour, they all get the same nose-ring, but the desire to express oneself and be different is hopelessly mixed up with the desire to belong and be accepted by one's peers. You mustn't make a fuss when the Blob rolls through your town; no, you must mindlessly sit in your movie seat and let the red stuff roll over you.

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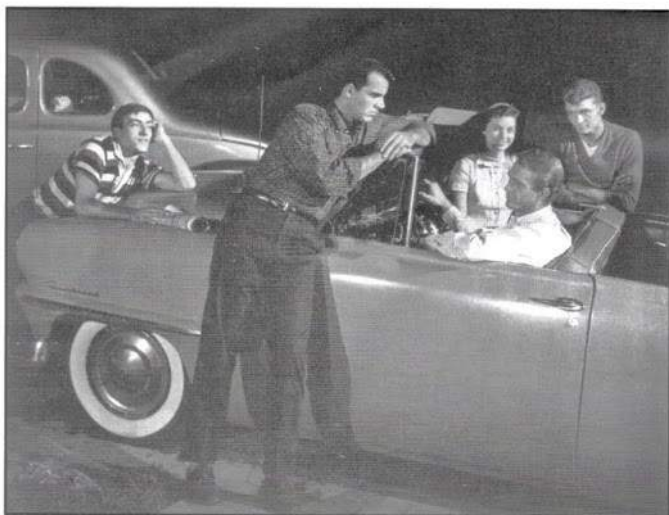
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In order to vanquish this threat, Steve needs to grow up and assume the mantle of responsibility, gaining the trust of the police and his parents, essentially bridging the gap—perhaps even making it possible for society's outcasts to return from the hills before they're claimed by terrors from beyond space. The temptation to drop out of society rather than try to change it gradually from within would soon be too great to ignore, and would ultimately bring about the huge generation gap of the sixties. But *THE BLOB* is fantasy, and Steve is ready to take the challenge.

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didn't exist," Steve says. Jane convinces him of the Blob's existence, and with her backing him up he's ready to fight rationality itself in order to conquer the foe, though he continues to harbor some doubts. ("Oh, boy, if this is just an ordinary night, we're both going to go home and go to sleep and tomorrow that sun's gonna shine, just like yesterday . . . good old yesterday.")

Steve has a spiritual awakening as the result of this crisis. He is humbled, able to appreciate the genuine "sameness" of things—or rather, the subtle but amazing differences within the on-the-surface sameness of reality, which on closer inspection is anything but identical. Like George Bailey (James Stewart) shouting with glee over his crusty old Savings & Loan in *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* (1946), Steve's eyes have been opened to the miracle of the mundane, everyday existence. For it's not mundane if we have eyes to see life as it really is, and only MTV, the Blob, our own egos, and the blinders on our perceptions can shrink our natural surroundings to dull uniformity.

Noticing the blob, seeing the threat, is actually a very important aspect of the story. The Blob doesn't get much screen time at all. After Steve sees the doc get killed, we have only one small scene of the alien's attack on a car mechanic (Robert Fields), who plans on getting drunk after work. ("Getting so loaded that I can't even see"—a plan similar to the Blob's). In each case, the concept of perception is a key factor. The mechanic literally "looks" forward to his own (alcohol-induced) blindness. The sheriff and the other adults won't "see" that Steve is telling the truth. As Chicolini (Chico Marx) asks in *DUCK SOUP* (1933), "Who are you gonna believe, me or your own eyes?" A teenager, Steve is invalid as a witness, subject to hysteric fits of imagination and hallucination—not to mention Widmarkian twitters. The gaudy trappings of faux rebellion work against genuine change, in prime Boy-Who-Cried-Wolf fashion. Like the old man, the mechanic is prime blob-food because he is unmoored from the conformist society; he is actually getting his wish for intoxication fulfilled in a symbolic way. Absorption into the Blob is the ultimate buzz, a dissolving into the larger, mindless Other.

Steve transcends this trap and, in his dad's grocery store, becomes a hero, protecting the hysterical Jane even though he has plenty of reasons of his own to be afraid. Again, he resembles James Dean, this time at the climax of *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*, as his heroic nature shines through after enduring the necessary catastrophe (the catalyst to wake into adulthood). "Everything's gonna be all right, Jane," he consoles her, and he seems to believe his own words, maybe for the first time in his life. He's making an actual difference, and his words have weight. The masculine urge to protect the weak has launched him from his sleeping teen rebel phase. He can "see" his way out of the maze.





PAGE 50 LEFT FILM STRIP: A hippie gets a Blob shampoo, Chester Hargis (Godfrey Cambridge) gets blobbed, *The Blob* and Mr. Chicken, Leslie accuses *The Blob* of being a road hog, a victim has a cross to bear, Sheriff Jones (Richard Webb) feels something damp and clammy crawling up his leg, and Paul Taylor (Donovan Leitch) calls the cops on *The Blob*. **PAGE 50 RIGHT FILM STRIP:** Paul gets blobbed from above, and winds up anticipating the killer from *SCREAM* (1996) by turning into Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*, George Ruit (Clayton Landey) gets yanked into a drainpipe by the gelatinous fiend, Fran Hewitt (Candy Clark) does her Tippi Hedren phone booth impersonation, and Sheriff Geller (Jeffrey DeMunn) goes to pieces. **ABOVE:** Brian Flagg (Kevin Dillon) and Meg Penny (Shawnee Smith) must save the day in the 1988 remake of *THE BLOB*.

Thus the movie ends with the townspeople coming together to smash up the school, and with the Blob's freezing. There's a real optimism at work in the film, that the adults can be just as ready for rebel violence as the young, and that the young can be just as ready to behave responsibly. The generation gap can be closed. Note that the film is populated with interestingly eccentric characters who challenge the status quo sameness of the advancing protoplasm: the wild revelers at a house party; the cop, Dave, who is open-minded enough to believe Steve's cockeyed story about a Blob from outer space. Half the town is packed into the mid-night show of *DAUGHTER OF HORROR* (a genuine 1955 fright film that does not star Bela Lugosi). For contrast, go to any suburban party today and you'll likely see identical clothes from the same Gap, the same football game on the same TV, and the same rock blaring from the same Sony sound system bought at the same Circuit City.

THE BLOB harbors a subtextual hope that the idiosyncratic "sharpness" of an awakened rebel teen like Steve might "hip" the adults to the invading generic sameness that is soon to sweep the nation. Steve is ultimately shown to actually be a rebel, in that he eventually rejects the commercialized trappings of rebellion circa 1959—the James Dean swagger and Russ Tamblyn smirk—to emerge a real figure of a hero. That Steve anguishes in his bed, that he has the guts to open up to a woman about his self-doubt, or admit to a cop that he's scared—what teenager who wraps himself in the

phony armor of cinema-sanctioned toughness would do these things? Steve has left them all behind.

And what more rousing sight can there be then when Jane's dad, the stuffy principal, takes a rock and smashes the high school's glass door? It's a moment meant to get its intended audience cheering, to wake the dreamers from the dream—but notice that it's not at the expense of the adults. Instead, the adult gets a chance to join the party; Jane's dad smashing the glass is a celebration. Adults have been made cool again, and the teens have proven themselves worthy of respect.

Of course, *THE BLOB* was far too optimistic, and by 1973 the generation gap had widened to the breaking point and beyond. In the films of the late sixties and early seventies, we saw an America splintered into groups that had almost no common cultural language, and a cinema divided into old-school Hollywood films aimed at middle-age audiences released side by side with such films as *EASY RIDER* (1969) and *M*A*S*H* (1972). By 1973, the countercultural film had taken over, and the sequel to *THE BLOB*—*BEWARE! THE BLOB* (1972, aka *SON OF BLOB*)—fit the bill. Less a genuine horror film than an extended stoner riff, it pokes fun at hippies as well as straights as it clumsily veers all over the map in a drunk-at-the-wheel hipster vein. It's low-rent Robert Altman, with an ensemble cast of hip comedians and young actors mouthing jiving, improvised dialogue in a schizophrenic tone that manages to be neither funny nor scary for more than a few seconds at a time.

Directed on the cheap by DALLAS star Larry Hagman, **BEWARE! THE BLOB** would later be revived during the "Who Shot J. R." craze of the early eighties, where it would show up billed as "the movie J. R. shot." With that big hype moment all but forgotten, **BEWARE! THE BLOB** stands today as an interesting time capsule, incorporating all sorts of seventies movie styles in its amorphous rhythm. Through it all, an insane synth soundtrack score by Mort Garson (composer of the hit song "Our Day Will Come") keeps things reeling from one ersatz moment to the next, veering from cop show funk to cheesy marching band to bad psychedelic rock. At times, there's a sort of high-spirited, rollicking insanity that conjures up images of Russ Meyer films circa the same year, but mostly what comes to mind is Altman by way of Herschel Gordon Lewis. The narrative is broken into shattered episodes that aren't connected as in Altman by a streamlined, loose-limbed narrative flow, but rather a lot of vignettes punctuated with Blob attacks.

BEWARE! THE BLOB opens with a kitten plunking its way through the grass on a sunny day, accompanied by Garson's main theme synth (which is accompanied by echo-laden screams). As with the first film, the credit sequence is totally disorienting, this time suggesting some kind of tampon commercial from seventies hell.

Finally, the kitten leads us to the home of Chester Hargis (Godfrey Cambridge), an African-American pipeline worker. Chester has just returned home to his loving wife, Marlene (Marlene Clark, best known for the 1969 cult film **PUTNEY SPOPE**), after three months in the Arctic. Their domestic scenes together immediately set the standard for what is to come, creating a loose, improvisatory tone filmed in a seventies TV commercial vibe of flat colors and bad sound. Chester has set up a tent in the living room and is getting ready to settle in for a relaxing afternoon of drinking beer and watching TV. He prepares for this enterprise by pouring all the beer his wife bought him into a single flower vase, presumably to speed the "getting drunk" process. As with the mechanic killed in the original who planned to get "so drunk (he) can't see," this desire of Chester's mirrors the Blob's own greedy intentions. While poking around in the fridge for cat food, Marlene discovers a container of Blob that Chester brought home from the frozen north. "That's my test sample, baby," he offers as the only clarification as to why he would bring such a thing home. Of course, Marlene leaves it out of the fridge. Soon it has thawed and devoured a housefly. And the kitten. And Marlene.

One can easily deconstruct this domestic scene as racist. Chester may in fact be a scientifically accredited individual assigned to hold onto the experimental Blob sample, the result of some sort of minority promotion—but due to the improvisatory, occasionally inaudible nature of the script, it's tough to be sure. If he got that Blob sample through proper scientific channels, however, it's a responsibility that he abuses in a most stereotypically shiftless manner. It's his focus on getting drunk and goofing off, in fact, that leaves Blob unattended and leads to the horrors to come. It's tough to get a handle on just what we're supposed to think of ol' Chester, actually.

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Cut to the swinging house of sculptress Lisa Clark (Gwynne Gilford) and her gang of friends (among them Carol Lynley as Leslie, and Cindy Williams as a guest providing hash brownies), all of them getting ready for a surprise birthday party for their friend, Bobby Hartford (Robert Walker, Jr.). The overlapping hipster dialogue is so thick in this scene that it's difficult to tell what's going on. (It's impossible not to sound like Robert Benchley as the narrator of 1946's **ROAD TO UTOPIA**—"This seems to be a scene they put in after I saw the picture in the studio. Obviously a lot of extras or—I don't know"—when discussing **BEWARE! THE BLOB**.) Next

we jump to Mr. Edelman (Dick Van Patten, hamming it up royally), a scout master leading a bunch of boy scouts (including Hagman's son, Preston, as Preston) on a hike. The boys stop to say, "Hello, Miss Clark," then "charge" up a hill to set up camp. (One thing **BEWARE! THE BLOB** doesn't need is more camp!)

Lisa drives over to Chester's house in time to see the Blob and Chester in mid-union. She freaks out and drives away to the thumping sound of pseudo-cop-show music. The rest of the film finds her fairly hysterical, trying—like Steve in the original—to warn the townspeople and convince them of the Blob's reality. It's the seventies, though, and she's dismissed as a drug freak by nearly everyone. Only Bobby believes Lisa, but they can't find much evidence to back up her claim. Their car scenes intercut with Blob attack vignettes to form the bulk of

the film. ("Some form of life... has been killing people all night!") The alien entity tries to attack the couple in their car, but the air conditioner—accidentally switched on—repels it.

Eventually, Bobby and Lisa wind up back at the hippie house, where the party guests greet them. (The revelers include Bud Cort in black beard and thick glasses, and, as Joe, Gerrit Graham in a gorilla suit.) But for the hysterical Lisa, everything would be a stone groove straight out of Roger Corman's **GAS-S-S-S** (1970), replete with a psychedelic jam rock score background. (The scene is reminiscent of Russ Meyer's 1970 cult item **BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS**. Both Cort and Graham were already—or about to become—cult items themselves, the former for 1970's **BREWSTER MCCLOUD** and 1971's **HAROLD AND MAUDE**, the latter for three Brian DePalma films: 1968's **GREETINGS**, 1970's **HI, MOM!**, and 1974's **PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE**.) "I noticed the moon was magnetized, and when I saw it I turned into a werewolf," one hippie intones, as if to explain away Lisa's bum trip. The groovy dialogue flows like cheap wine, and no one can stop being glib long enough to sense her genuine distress.

The dialogue of the hip, soon-to-be eaten characters is occasionally worth noting. On its way to the bowling alley where it will finally go public and start attacking everyone en masse, the Blob rolls past a barn to soak



LEFT: Away goes trouble (plus the kitchen help) down the drain in **THE BLOB** (1988). RIGHT: In the eighties remake, **THE BLOB** has a government conspiracy to back it up.



up some stew bums. An unbilled Burgess Meredith is one (director Larry Hagman is another), and his dialogue includes the lines "You gotta take your beard off, man" and "You like the hippies, man, as long as we give you something, you happy." His companion replies, "Hippie schmippie, I'll tell you something about brain surgery." (With 1971's drug-bust film **CLAY PIGEON** and the same year's **SUCH GOOD FRIENDS**—in which the former Penguin went featherless—among his early seventies credits, one wonders what Meredith was smoking in those days.) In the bowling alley, one of the pin monkeys (Fred Smoot) laments that his piano-happy partner "could be playing some beautiful Tocatta N. Fewgies." They're all so busy doing their beatnik riffing that they fail to see the danger dripping down on them. Clever wordplay has taken over, rendering communication about real issues thoroughly null and void. When the Blob starts pouring down the alley toward the bowlers, the panic begins. No one has a correct reaction and people run in all sorts of wrong directions. One victim ineffectually waves a cross at the thing, as if it were a vampire. (He's so out of it he's in the wrong movie!)

In parallel, we have Sheriff Jones (Richard Webb), whose inability to take Lisa's warnings seriously has led to this situation. Like Lisa's friends at the party, he writes her ravings off as the work of drugs. ("Maybe you two are on a trip or something... I don't know and I don't care.") There is real defeat in his voice, as he is not even up to the

task of trying to arrest her for drugs. The generation gap has moved far beyond the hands-on meddling that was such a big part of the original **BLOB**. Here, there is an inability to even approach the other's level thanks to the "liberating" aspects of psychedelic drugs—or even the suspicion of drug use—which have "turned on" one generation and let the other far behind. In the original, Steve and the adults were reunited against a common foe just as they were starting to drift apart. Here, the drift has already widened into a veritable sea; all the generations can do is curiously eye each other from the uncrossable distance as the Blob sucks them through the sewer grates. (Bye bye, Cindy Williams!) Even as this menace forces the "opposing teams" to work together, they never quite bridge the gap. This space between the stoners and the law is where the Blob grows, and that space is massive.

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Continued on page 62

LEFT: A typical American mother reacts calmly upon learning that the Federal Marriage Amendment banning gay marriage has failed in the Senate. Sonny wonders if he'll ever again be allowed to play with young Bobby down the block. RIGHT: The cast of **THE BLOB** remake celebrates the destruction of the monster by recreating the cheery final scene from **WHITE CHRISTMAS** (1954).



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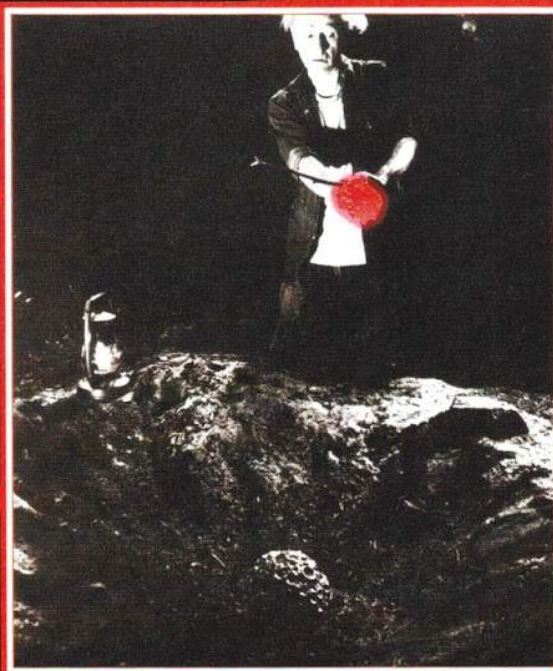
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KAY LINAKER

Continued from page 44

made the test and Jimmy asked for you, but Margaret Lindsay got the part. So ask for your release before the picture comes out." I talked it over with my agent and he got my release. When ROAD GANG was released, Jack Warner wanted me back. He said, "Look, I've made a terrible mistake; I should have never given her a release." My agent said, "She's going to stay free-lance"—and I did, for my entire career. Everybody thinks I was under contract to 20th Century, but I wasn't. I just free-lanced. Money-wise, it was much better.

SS: When you're a free-lance actor, you don't have the protection of a studio, though.

KP: Well, that's not quite true. You'd get parts as a free-lance actor because they figured they could get you cheaper and—if you were good—they could offer you a contract. And if you were in a bad picture and you were good, it didn't make any difference, because you were good! The idea that the studio protected you was a false thing promulgated through the studios in order to get people under contract for less money, and keep 'em under contract for less money. At the time I was making films, the studio system was not too bad for free-lancers. People under contract had trouble, though. Jack Warner saw Olivia DeHavilland in a production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM at the Hollywood Bowl and put her under contract. He had this idea of making a super-duper film which was going to introduce the motion-picture viewing public to Shakespeare. Jimmy Cagney was in it and Mickey Rooney played Puck. It was a prestigious film and they used all their contract players. Max Reinhardt was the director and he spoke no English. The assistant director was Michael Curtiz. He spoke German and could translate what Max Reinhardt wanted to the actors. Unfortunately, it didn't get the response that Jack Warner wanted, but he did get people under contract for very little money, including Olivia DeHavilland. Warner was very stingy and Olivia finally sued him in order to



get out of her basic contract. Bette Davis sued him, too. Bette Davis was not pretty—and, in her first two or three films, she was stinkin' lousy—but then she did Somerset Maugham's OF HUMAN BONDAGE and became a star.

SS: A standard contract ran for seven years.
KP: Seven years, and you were supposed to get more money as you went along—except that Jack Warner always had an excuse not to give you more money. He'd tell you how much money your last film lost; he was a great manipulator. He was always trying to prove to everybody that his brother who died wasn't the real genius; he was the real genius! He was an interesting man. If you looked at Jack Warner from Jack Warner's point of view, he was not a nasty, conniving man. He didn't try to hurt people; he just tried to get the best deal he could.

SS: You appeared in a number of Charlie Chan mysteries.

KP: Yes, CHARLIE CHAN IN MONTE CARLO was my first—but quite frankly, I don't remember the titles of all of them. Some were very small bits, and I even played an apparition in one. I didn't get screen credit for that one. They wouldn't give me screen credit because I was an illusion. (Laughs) It was something about a phony mystic—CHARLIE CHAN AT TREASURE ISLAND. I was in the last Charlie Chan starring Warner Oland and the first one with Sidney Toler. Sidney decided that he wasn't going to copy Warner's performance. There were certain things he'd have to do to keep the continuity the same, but he wasn't an imitator. He did his own version of Chan, but it was done from the standpoint of the Charlie Chan books. His sense of humor was completely according to the original Chan.

SS: What did they do to make you look like an apparition in CHARLIE CHAN AT TREASURE ISLAND?

KP: Well, I put my head through a black jersey. It clung right along my hairline, so that you'd just see my face. They put gummy makeup on me, which wasn't powdered down. They put the stuff on my face, then pulled their hands away and it left peaks and bumps and lumps. Then they sprayed it with

something and put powder on it. I was sitting on a platform—I was about eight feet off the floor—so that they were shooting up at me. There was no way I could get out until somebody pulled the zipper. We shot all morning and then lunch was called. And everybody went to lunch and they forgot about me! (Laughs) They left me sitting up there! I screamed and yelled, but the stages were soundproof and the doors were shut. Finally, somebody came in to check on the lights and heard me. They unzipped me and I was a most unappetizing thing. I went into the commissary for lunch and people got sick at the sight of me! I didn't care!

SS: There was nearly a fatal accident on CHARLIE CHAN'S MURDER CRUISE. A gentleman was supposed to choke you.

KP: And he did! He had served in World War One and was shell shocked. Something snapped and it probably was two or three months before he was able to work again. His wife called me to apologize and I said, "Let's just forget about it, because it has nothing to do with who the man is under ordinary circumstances." But if it hadn't been for the second cameraman helping me, who knows what might have happened? Both my arms were in casts, and I was tied in a wheelchair. I couldn't push him away. The scene was on a ship. Everybody went out into the corridor, and the camera was dolly with them, and suddenly the cameraman who was playing out the cable behind the dolly saw what was happening and screamed, "Cut!"

SS: Thank God! What can you tell us about Charlie Chan's sons?

KP: Well, Victor Sen Young was an absolute darling—not that all of 'em weren't charming. On CHARLIE CHAN IN RENO, there was a young Chinese girl who played a maid. She was a darling; her name was Iris Wong. We were all trying to fix her up with Sen Young, because they were so cute together. A friend of Sen's came on the set and he was a nice guy—but Sen was all bubbly and this chap was flat! We thought Sen was a much better choice for Iris. Well, after we'd been working for two weeks, we moved to another set that they'd just finished painting. They used banana oil in the paint and it really smelled to high heaven, those ba-



Page 54 LEFT: Kay Linaker shares a good laugh on the set of a Charlie Chan mystery with Mr. Chan himself—Warner Oland. PAGE 54 RIGHT: A confrontation between Jeanne Bentley (Louise Henry) and Mrs. Russell (Kay Linaker) in *CHARLIE CHAN IN RENO* (1939) is witnessed by Dr. Ainsley (Ricardo Cortez). LEFT: The body of Jeanne Bentley is discovered by the hotel night clerk (Hamilton MacFadden), Mrs. Russell, and Mary Whitman (Pauline Moore) in *CHARLIE CHAN IN RENO*.

nanas! Iris said, "Oh, my God! I'm gonna be sick!" Nobody thought much about it, except that the next day she was looking fine but again said she was nauseated. Finally, on the third day, she said, "Oh, when does this morning sickness stop?" I said, "Morning sickness? Oh, my God, Iris!" And she said, "Well, the guy who's been visiting the set—he's my husband. My family doesn't approve of him, so we haven't said anything. Nobody knows except you." So that was the end of our plans for Iris and Sen—but I'm the godmother of that child.

SS: What about another of Charlie's sons—Keye Luke?

KP: Keye Luke was a brilliant artist—really talented, really gifted. He was also extremely bright. He was quieter than Sen, but he had a lovely pixie sense of humor. He was always one step ahead of everybody else. And he had marvelous concentration; as an actor, he had wonderful concentration.

SS: He argued with Sol Wurtzel about the character of Lee Chan. He wanted his character to be smart once in awhile, but Wurtzel said there was only one smart detective and that was Charlie Chan.

KP: Sol Wurtzel happened to be a very wise man. He was a big man; physically, he was very big. I must have been in his office a dozen times before I saw him stand up. He sat behind the desk in his three-button suit with a vest. He was not a particularly handsome man; his features were coarse and heavy. He had a pair of eyes that were hooded, and every once in awhile he'd open them wide and you'd see why he kept his eyes half closed all the time. They were twinkling! You couldn't help but grin when you saw his eyes wide open. When your agent was trying to get you an extra \$500 and you were sitting there, he made it a point never to look at you; he'd concentrate on the agent. He glanced up one day and I was grinning. And he looked at me and we both burst out laughing! After that, whenever I saw him on the lot, he'd say, "Hi, Giggles!"

SS: That's a cute story. Warner Oland had a serious drinking problem, didn't he?

KP: Warner was a thorough gentleman; he was delightful! He was on time every morning and just as gracious and charming as he could possibly be, and he had

synth chasers and you could see the fog rising in his eyes. He'd sit in his canvas dressing room on the set for the rest of the day and then, when we were dismissed, he was dismissed along with everybody else. He was such a charming gentleman and so very delightful that nobody ever said anything—but absinth is a very dangerous drink and it just got to him. It was just after *CHARLIE CHAN AT MONTE CARLO* that he disappeared, and they finally found him after several serious months of looking for him. He went back to where he was born and was really out of it.

SS: You were in *CHARLIE CHAN IN RENO* and *CHARLIE CHAN IN RIO*, both of which had small roles for Hamilton MacFadden, who had originally been the director on the series when it started.

KP: He was one of the people at the house party in *RIO*, yes. He never said anything about having made the earlier films. He was just doing his job and was a nice guy.

SS: *RIO* was directed by Harry Lachman, the one person Keye Luke seems to have really disliked. Was he unpleasant?

KP: Not particularly, no. He was just somebody who was bored with what he was doing. He just wasn't particularly interested.

SS: Like Tod Browning, Lachman simply put his film career behind him.

KP: Tod Browning never talked about movies, but he was very, very pleased with his corn crop. The only thing he was interested in when we were neighbors was his wife's health and her happiness and his garden at Malibu. He was a very nice gent and his wife was an absolute darling.

SS: You worked with Charlie Chan, but never with Mr. Moto, although you did make a film called *CRACK-UP* with Peter Lorre.

KP: Well, he was a darling! What people don't understand is that, when you went on a picture, you became a member of that family. I can't remember being on a picture where most people didn't like one another, and Peter was particularly nice. I played Ralph Morgan's wife in *CRACK-UP*. It was the story of a man with a dream of flying nonstop from West to East across the Atlantic

Ocean. Ralph Morgan played the man. He had a young man working for him, played by Lester Matthews, and Ralph married a younger woman. She's an unpleasant, irresponsible person, and she has an affair with his young protégé. That accounts for the fact that, when the flight finally takes off, Ralph goes along because he's discovered what's going on between his protégé and his wife. That's what the film was supposed to be about, up to that point.

SS: But it wasn't the way it wound up?

KP: After the picture was finished, there was a two-week break and then we were called back. We went on the soundstage and it was all set up for me to throw a bottle of champagne at the aircraft and say, "I christen thee Wild Goose." Ralph and Lester were sitting beside me. I threw the bottle and they cut all of us out of the beginning of the film! The whole beginning was cut, and Ralph appears in the plane as it's foundering and sinking and the water is rising in the cockpit. Nobody knows how the hell he got there! (Laughs) Someone got the bright idea to improve Peter Lorre's part and to improve Brian Donlevy's part, so they just cut out the other parts to make room for it. The character that Peter played—a spy who was after something or other—he had a harmonica or a little whistle that he played and he walked around being goony.

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Musicals and More

Reviews by Anthony Dale and Richard Valley

Godzilla had it easy. He only had to fight Mothra, King Kong, Biollante, Ghidrah, Megalon, Rodan, Angorons, and a few other lizards from the minor leagues. He never had to face the meteoric, overpowering force of nature called Ethel Merman. Neither, for the most part, did moviegoers—and that's a shame. The Merm made less than two dozen films in a career whose primary focus was the theater. And of those films, only two starred her in roles she originated on the Great White Way—ANYTHING GOES (1936) and CALL ME MADAM (1953).

Though ANYTHING GOES is cruelly bowdlerized (missing such Cole Porter gems as "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" and "All Through the Night"), CALL ME MADAM (20th Century Fox Home Video, \$14.98) is a brassy delight. Merman plays Washington hostess Sally Adams, a character based on the real-life Pearl Mesta, who'd been appointed Ambassador to Luxembourg by President Harry Truman. In MADAM, Sally's pal Harry ships her off to the Grand Duchy of Lichtenburg, where she wins over the citizens (after first calling them "grand Dutchmen"). Romance blossoms between Sally and Cosmo Constantine (George Sanders), Lichtenburg's suave foreign minister. Meanwhile, Sally's press attache, Kenneth Gibson (Donald O'Connor), falls hard for the Princess Maria (Vera-Ellen), creating diplomatic chaos.

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part—had usually been associated with women of a certain age, including the supremely gifted Carol Channing (the original singing Dolly). Streisand's not entirely at ease in the acting department, but everything comes together when she tackles the tunes. Having Gene Kelly at the helm insured that each musical number—there are over a dozen—looks as splendid as possible, whether Dolly is framed in a gaslight window for a tender ballad or bedecked in lavender while belting a high E amidst a parade of red uniforms. For the title tune, Streisand effortlessly executes Michael Kidd's acrobatic dance steps (granted, the gypsies behind her are there to make her look better than she is) before historically joining jazz master Louis Armstrong for a chorus.



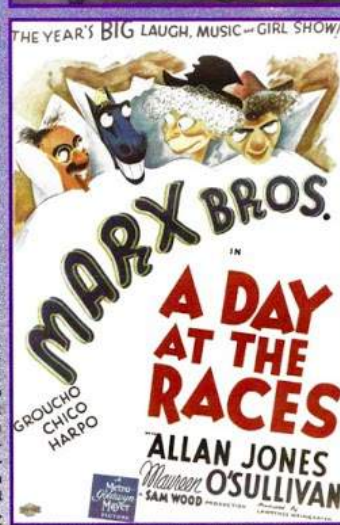
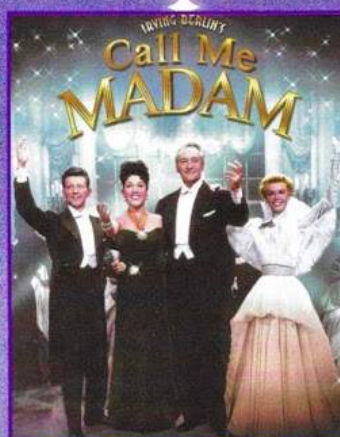
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Musicals and More

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LEFT TOP: YOU'LL NEVER GET RICH (1941) was the first starring vehicle for Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth. LEFT CENTER: Dorothy Lamour sings "Lovely Luauana Lady" in THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH (1952). LEFT BOTTOM: The circus audience watches, spellbound. RIGHT TOP: Donald O'Connor, Ethel Merman, George Sanders, and Vera-Ellen in CALL ME MADAM (1953). RIGHT CENTER: A DAY AT THE RACES (1937) was the Marx Brothers' second MGM comedy. RIGHT BOTTOM: Lee Bowman, Rita Hayworth, Otto Kruger, and Eve Arden hear wedding bells in COVER GIRL (1944).

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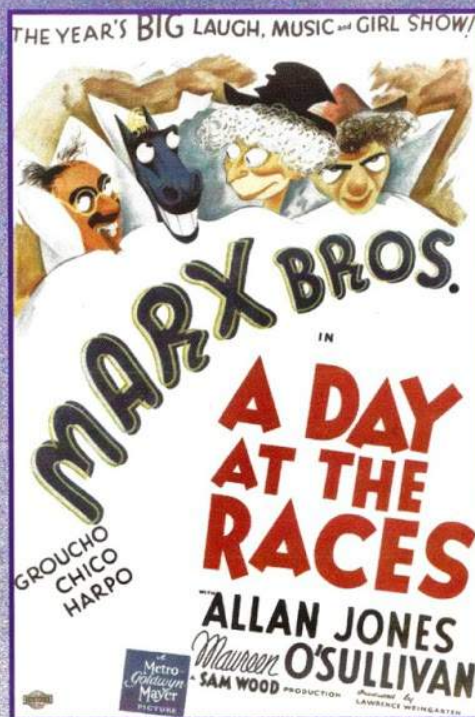
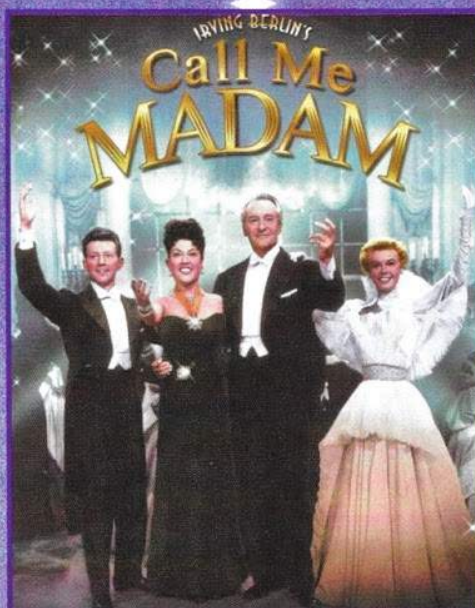
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Andrews literally jumps through hoops to make the number work, strutting sensuously in a skintight, sequined leotard while side-show personalities caper around her. Incredibly, she succeeds—not in creating a true theatrical experience, but one that only Hollywood can offer.

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend—or, better yet, turn it into a musical! That early 20th-century legend, Al Jolson, rated not one, but two Technicolor biopics covering 60 years of his life in the limelight. You can't get much more old-fashioned than Columbia's irrepressibly hokey takes on Jolson's life—1947's *THE JOLSON STORY* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, \$19.95) and 1950's *JOLSON SINGS AGAIN* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, \$19.95). With splendid Technicolor prints, these DVDs chronicle Asa Yoelson's meteoric rise from in-house vaudeville plant to touring minstrel to the point where he is known as Al Jolson, the self-proclaimed, "World's Greatest Entertainer."

Taken together, the films are a joy ride through the Great American Songbook as sung by filmdom's first all-talking, all-singing star. Jolie's own distinctive voice flows from Larry Parks' lips. Parks is pleasing as Jolson (who, as a child, is played by Scotty Beckett), giving Jolie's famous posturings and poses their proper due. (One of the performance's more bizarre highlights occurs in the second film, when Larry Parks as Jolson meets Larry Parks as Larry Parks about to tackle the role of Jolson in *THE JOLSON STORY*.) As a fictionalized Ruby Keeler in *THE JOLSON STORY*, Evelyn Keyes radiates warmth and affection, and does a fantastic impression of Jolson, herself. Barbara Hale offers her own brand of warmth as wife number two (actually, four) in the sequel. The theatrical tradition of burnt-cork blackface is presented unapologetically and accurately. If the name of Jolson only conjures up the image of a politically incorrect, mammy-loving crooner, these two discs, brimming with bravura, bravado, and brio may not set the record

straight biographically speaking, but will allow outdated theatrical ruses to be seen in their historical contexts.

Presented in the original theatrical aspect ratios, *THE JOLSON STORY* and *JOLSON SINGS AGAIN* are remarkably clean and artifact free. The monaural soundtracks bring new life to such beloved standards as "Let Me Sing and I'm Happy," "My Mammy," "Sonny Boy," and "Swanee." (Jolson himself appears briefly in long shot during *THE JOLSON STORY*'s "Swanee" sequence.) Unashamedly corny, these films showcase the sheer joy that music can bring, to both an audience and a performer.

Charm comes in all sizes, as do musicals dependent on charm—from the dozens of singers and dancers in George Sidney's *HALF A SIXPENCE* (Paramount Home Video, \$14.99) to the seven singers in Stanley Donen's *THE LITTLE PRINCE* (Paramount Home Video, \$14.99).

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's fable, *Le Petit Prince* (1943) has been translated into nearly as many languages as the Bible; its translation to the screen in 1974 marked the final collaboration between the legendary musical team of Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner, no strangers to setting classics to music. The episodic, fairy-tale nature of *Le Petit Prince* easily lends itself to musicalization. The titular royalty is an otherworldly being who appears to a downed aviator in the heat of the Sahara desert with the request, "Draw me a sheep, please." The slight story—the prince relates his journey from his home on a tiny asteroid to the earth, where he has made friends with a snake and a fox (and this without landing in Hollywood!)—rises above simple kiddie fare via perfectly cast performers and Lerner and Loewe's lilting tunes. Broadway's Donna McKechnie appears all too briefly as a selfish, narcissistic rose. (Incidentally, McKechnie's role became the basis for the character of Cassie in the long-running Broadway show *A CHORUS LINE*.) Gene Wilder slyly personifies the fox, while Bob Fosse slithers away with the film in his self-choreographed sequence as a deadly, sibilant asp. As the pilot, Richard Kiley's brash baritone brings more humanity to the score than it probably deserves. Though his characterization is spot-on perfect, and he is utterly adorable, Steve Warner's title character has been topped with what appears to be Donnie Dunagan's hair from *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1939).

Based on H. G. Wells' *Kipps* (1905), *HALF A SIXPENCE* (1967) is built entirely on charm—from its lovelorn leads all the way down to its pleasant, energetic musical numbers. The talented and toothsome Tommy Steele re-creates his theatrical turn as Arthur Kipps, from cheery Cockney stock, who comes into a suprising inheritance, loses the love of his childhood sweetheart, and sweeps her back into his arms with song and dance. Veteran director George Sidney

ably whittles down Steele's larger-than-life persona into a controlled, believable character, much as he did with Elvis Presley, Steele's American counterpart, in *VIVA LAS VEGAS* (1964). Flashing his baby-blues, strumming a banjo, and softly duetting with his lady love, Steele commands the screen with showbiz savvy and flair. Matching him note for note is Julia Foster, who delivers a solid performance as Kipps' true love—although the notes for notes are dubbed by future Andrew Lloyd Webber erstwhile, Marti Webb. That dastardly ol' Captain Hook himself, Cyril Ritchard, lends solid support, and further down the cast list can be found the talented toe-tapper (and Anthony Perkins' secret love), Grover Dale.

Paramount has worked wonders on both pictures, each formerly victims of studio tampering. Though each has its share of problematic photography elements, the DVDs more than accurately mirror the original widescreen presentations. Brightly colored costumes are appropriately eye-popping, most notably in *HALF A SIXPENCE*'s production numbers. The intimacy of *THE LITTLE PRINCE* is achieved through cycloramas, subdued tones, distorted lens work, and animation. Neither film was a moneymaker, but each has gained a devoted following.

ROXIE HART (20th Century Fox Home Video, \$14.98) isn't a musical, but it became one—first on Broadway in 1975 with Gwen Verdon, Chita Rivera, and Jerry Orbach, again on Broadway in 1996 with Ann Reinking, Bebe Neuwirth, and James Naughton, and then on film in 2002 with Renee Zellweger, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Richard Gere. The 1942 production boasts as its star one of the greatest of all musical icons—Ginger Rogers.

Based on the 1926 play *CHICAGO* by Maurine Watkins, *ROXIE HART* tells the tale of a fame-crazy tramp (Rogers) who rises to temporary glory on the wings of a murder rap. In all other versions of the story, Roxie's guilty as sin, but the Hollywood production code of the forties would never have let a murderess go scott free, so here the guilty party is hapless hubby Amos Hart (George Chandler). You won't find much of Roxie's jailmate, Velma Kelly (the part played by Rivera, Neuwirth, and Zeta-Jones), either; here, she's named Velma Wall (Helene Reynolds) and has only one scene.

Rogers pulls out all the stops as Roxie; she's clearly determined to play someone as far removed from her Oscar-winning *KITTY FOYLE* (1940) as possible. Matching her outrage for outrage is Adolphe Menjou as corrupt lawyer Billy Flynn. The top-notch supporting cast includes Sara Allgood (as Matron Morton), Spring Byington (as Mary Sunshine), Iris Adrian (as Two-Gun Gertie Baxter), Lynn Overman (as reporter Jake Callahan), William Frawley (as jurist O'Malley), Phil Silvers (as photographer Babe), and Nigel Bruce (in a rare foray from Baker Street, as theatrical impresario E. Clay Benham). George Montgomery



PAGE 58: Adolphe Menjou and Ginger Rogers spread the razzle dazzle in *ROXIE HART* (1942). **TOP LEFT:** Angela Lansbury and Len Cariou (the original Sweeney, replaced by George Hearn for the DVD) cut a musical swath through London in *SWEENEY TODD—THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET* (1982). **TOP CENTER:** Groucho Marx and Margaret Dumont pretend they're Andy Hardy and Polly Benedict in *AT THE CIRCUS* (1939). **TOP RIGHT:** Sal Mineo is a different drummer in *THE GENE KRUPA STORY* (1959).

plays Roxie's handsome love interest, Homer Howard.

ROXIE HART has brains enough to let Rogers tap her talented toes for a few sparkling moments—doing the Black Bottom in jail. It may not be *CHICAGO*, but this caustic screwball gem still offers a lot of razzle dazzle.

Murder also rears its bloodied noggin in two DVD releases highlighting the darker talents of Stephen Sondheim—*SWEENEY TODD* (Warner Home Video, \$24.98) and *THE LAST OF SHEILA* (Warner Home Video, \$19.98).

Armed with a truly immersive Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack (and some very sharp friends), Stephen Sondheim's *SWEENEY TODD—THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET* (1982) tells the tale of Benjamin Barker (George Hearn), a wronged man seeking revenge through the false identity of the titular Sweeney. As he proclaims in the brilliantly crafted tour-de-force "Epiphany," no man is safe from his wrath, "not one man, no, nor 10 men, nor a thousand can assuage me." To seek revenge may lead to hell, but, as Sweeney's lovelorn accomplice Nellie Lovett (Angela Lansbury) would say, "Everyone does it, but seldom as well as Sweeney." (Sweeney carves his victims in his barber chair; Mrs. Lovett serves 'em up as meat pies.) The deep, dark satire is set against foggy London town's Industrial Revolution.

Lansbury brings her own special brand of music-hall expertise (1945's *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*) to the role of Mrs. Lovett. Hearn's Todd

descends into madness measure by measure and note by note; his final realization of life's ironic cruelty is heart-breakingly tearful. Though Eugene Lee's monstrous Broadway set, which was built from scrap metal from British foundries, has been scaled down for this touring company production, the original Hal Prince staging remains thanks to video director Terry Hughes' crafty camera placement throughout Los Angeles' Ahmanson Theater. *SWEENEY TODD* serves up musical vengeance, making the most of Sondheim's savory score. Warner Home Video's outstanding DVD makes one want to cry out, "God! That's good!"

To play "The Shelia Green Memorial Gossip Game," it's best to spend a week on a yacht moored off the Cote D'Azur—and vital to have no secrets worth exposing. This game is deadly—and for its host, Clinton Green (James Coburn), it's murder. Six guests, six secrets—a glamorous actress (Raquel Welch) and her ambitious husband (Ian McShane), a failed screenwriter (Richard Benjamin) and his long-suffering wife (Joan Hackett), a director (James Mason) on the skids, and a Sue Mengers-inspired Hollywood talent agent (Dyan Cannon). They're all invited to discuss Green's latest project, a cinematic valentine to the late Sheila and her tragic death a year earlier. (The guests are all suspects.) Green is the ultimate gamester; the yacht's interior seems to have been designed by Parker Brothers. Six "pretend" pieces of gossip are handed out

to the players; each secret will be revealed through a series of "treasure hunts" in a different port of call each evening. Still, as Green says early in the proceedings, you don't have to move to play this game—"if you're smart enough."

THE LAST OF SHEILA (1973) is smart enough. Stephen Sondheim and Anthony Perkins (Norman Bates himself!) furnish a script that is in turn biting, intellectual, and arcane. Satiric portraits of Hollywood types are etched in the dialogue, and masterly painted by a talented cast. Lean and lanky Coburn delivers a wickedly delightful study in manipulation, seemingly based on Sondheim's own mannerisms. Benjamin's character shares a secret with screenwriter Perkins. Cannon tackles her man-eater role with gusto. Mason is reliable and droll. ("A client is peeing on my leg.") Hackett (despite initial qualms with the script) is solid in a non-showy characterization. McShane wears his heart on his sleeve and the tightest pants this side of Hollywood Boulevard. Welch, who attempted to sue director Herbert Ross for assault and battery, is sleek and shiny in her bikinis.

Warner Home Video's DVD is presented with anamorphic enhancement; the location shooting provides a shimmering, sun-drenched setting for *SHEILA*'s often unpleasant characters. Cannon and Benjamin sit together for a humorous commentary track, while Welch, recorded separately, wistfully recounts her experiences. The film's trailer introduces the mystery's charac-

BOTTOM LEFT: Bing Crosby and Ben Lessy kill vaudeville all over again in *JUST FOR YOU* (1952). **BOTTOM CENTER:** Bob Hope and Lucille Ball hit the rails in the slapstick Western *FANCY PANTS* (1950). **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Barbra Streisand is backed by a dozen better dancers in the title number from *HELLO, DOLLY!* (1969).



ters without giving away any of its secrets. One minor caveat—a piece of music in the film's first scene has been altered without explanation. The music is Sondheim's own "Anyone Can Whistle," performed on piano as Sheila (Yvonne Romaine, familiar to all fans of Hammer Horror) meets her fate, has been replaced with Billy Goldenberg's original film music. Ah—another mystery in the air!

From the phony tinsel of Hollywood, we turn to the real tinsel of the circus—specifically, Cecil B. DeMille's *THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH* (Paramount Home Video, \$14.99).

The 1952 superproduction marked producer/director DeMille's sole Academy Award for Best Picture. It's typically "everything and the kitchen sink" DeMille, but instead of biblical pieties the Great Director opts for sawdust and spangles, all wrapped up in a personally delivered narration that makes Ringling Bros.—Barnum & Bailey sound like the first book of Genesis. (Even future Moses Charlton Heston is on hand, grimly determined as Brad, the circus boss.)

The plot concerns a battle for the center ring between aerialists Holly (Betty Hutton, her comic zing wasted in a "serious role") and The Great Sebastien (Cornel Wilde, baring an impressive physique that alone should have netted him the star spot). Subplots involve Buttons (James Stewart), a clown with a mysterious past and a disinclination to remove his makeup, and Angel (Gloria Grahame) and Klaus (Lyle Bettger), the latter an insanely jealous animal trainer who packs a mean pachyderm. Acting as a one-woman Greek chorus is Phyllis (Dorothy Lamour), who only shuts her trap when it's clamped on a piece of leather and she's hanging far above the circus audience. (Watch the crowd carefully when Dottie sings and sways to "Lovely Luawana Lady.")

It's all a lot of cheesy fun, with genuine circus stars (including clowns Emmett Kelly and Lou Jacobs), several songs, and a spectacular train wreck for a grand finale. Paramount's DVD offers nothing befitting a Best Picture—not even the theatrical trailer—but the film itself shimmers sufficiently. And who can resist DeMille subtly proclaiming: "We bring you the circus—the Pied Piper whose magic tunes lead children of all ages from six to 60 into a tinsel and spun-candy world of reckless beauty and mounting laughter . . . but behind all this, the circus is a massive machine whose very life depends on discipline and motion and speed, a mechanized army on wheels that rolls over any obstacle in its path, that meets calamity again and again, but always comes up smiling, a place where disaster and tragedy stalk the big top, haunt the back yard, and ride the circus train, where death is constantly watching for one frayed rope, one weak link, or one trace of fear, a fierce, primitive fighting force that smashes relentlessly forward against impossible odds . . ."

Anyone for the dancing poodles?

Lamour's cohorts in the classic road pictures—Bing Crosby and Bob Hope—are represented by two new DVDs. Der Bingle's two films with Jane Wyman—*HERE COMES THE GROOM* (1951) and *JUST FOR YOU* (1952)—are paired on a single disc (Paramount Home Video, \$14.99), while *O! Ski* Nose's *FANCY PANTS* (1950) hits the trail solo (Paramount Home Video, \$14.99).

The black-and-white *HERE COMES THE GROOM* is Crosby's first pairing with Wyman, but his second with director Frank Capra. (The first was 1950's *RIDING HIGH*.) Those who think Capra's light comedies of the fifties marked a comedown for the man behind *LOST HORIZON* (1937), *MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON* (1939), and *MEET JOHN DOE* (1941), forget that he got his name above the title via such frothy fare as *LADY FOR A DAY* (1933) and *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT* (1934). *GROOM*'s narrative centers on the efforts of journalist Pete Garvey (Crosby) to adopt war orphans Bobby and Suzi (Jacques Gancel and Beverly Washburn)—the main stumbling block being that he needs a wife right quick. Unfortunately, fiancée Emmadel Jones (Wyman) has dumped him for millionaire Wilbur Stanley (Franchot Tone). Further complications come from Winifred Stanley (Alexis Smith), who desperately wants Wilbur for her own kissin' cousin.

The film's a charmer, but not without flaws. The plot takes forever to get rolling, stopping here for an extraneous subplot involving a blind orphan with a golden voice (Anna Maria Alberghetti), there for a song packed with admittedly welcome guest stars (Dorothy Lamour, Cass Daley, Louis Armstrong, Frank Fontaine, and Phil Harris). It's almost 20 minutes into the story before Crosby and Wyman share a scene (and then she's only an imaginary Emmadel standing atop a spinning recording of her voice). They finally meet face to face shortly past the half-hour point, and send *GROOM* zooming into high gear with Johnny Mercer and Hoagy Carmichael's Oscar-winning "In the Cool Cool Cool of the Evening" after 50 minutes. From that point, it's smooth sailing for the final hour.

JUST FOR YOU, inspired by Stephen Vincent Benet's short story "Famous" (1942), is a Technicolor musical dramedy about Broadway producer Jordan Blake (Crosby), forever too busy turning out hits to find time for offspring Jerry (Robert Arthur) and Barbara (Natalie Wood). Musical comedy star Carolina Hill (Wyman) understands when Jordan, a widower, postpones marriage in order to recapture the love of his kids, but complications ensue when Barbara begs to get into an exclusive girls' school run by Alida De Bronkhart (Ethel Barrymore) and Jerry develops a crush on Carolina. The histrionics are periodically interrupted by some smart, understated songs by Harry Warren and Leo Robin ("I'll Si Si Ya in Bahia," "The Ten Ten from Ten Ten Tennessee," and espe-

cially "Zing a Little Zong") and all ends happily. (Seekers of heavenly bodies are advised to look for Julie Newmar in the chorus.)

Bob Hope teams with occasional co-star Lucille Ball in the comic Western *FANCY PANTS*, based ever so loosely on Harry Leon Wilson's *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1915). Hope and Ball also graced the big screen in *SORROWFUL JONES* (1949), *THE FACTS OF LIFE* (1960), and *CRITIC'S CHOICE* (1963), but *FANCY PANTS* is the only one of their films to highlight the slapstick for which Lucy is justly famous. In the original novel and its 1935 film version, Marmaduke Ruggles is a butler won in a card game and transported way out West. In *FANCY PANTS*, Ruggles is renamed Humphrey, but he's really actor Arthur Tyler (Hope), who's been ineptly portraying a butler on the stage. He still winds up in the West, trying to civilize Aggie Floud (Ball) and chumming it up with Teddy Roosevelt (John Alexander, in effect repeating his stage, screen, and TV role of *ARSENIC AND OLD LACE*'s Teddy Brewster). It's a fun romp.

Sometimes a film mixes genres, as does *FANCY PANTS* with its Western setting and slapstick hijinks. And sometimes a film's sequel jumps genres entirely—as does *DOWN TO EARTH* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, \$14.95), the 1947 musical fantasy follow-up to the nonmusical fantasy *HERE COMES MR. JORDAN* (1941).

Movie goddess Rita Hayworth plays Greek goddess Terpsichore, who, outraged by a musical making mock of the muses, arranges with heavenly figurehead Mr. Jordan (Roland Culver, stepping in for Claude Rains) to make a quick hop to terra firma. As Kitty Pendleton, Terps lands the star role in the show and turns it into a pretentious flop before "coming to her senses" and giving her all to make it a tacky hit. Hit or flop, the film itself is almost a complete misfire, and the songs by Doris Fisher and Allan Roberts are among the worst ever marring a major Hollywood musical.

Given the chance, Hayworth dances divinely, but she's almost never given the chance. Vocally, she's dubbed by Anita Ellis, and even her solid talent can't transform the dross of the score into gold. Larry Parks plays the show's producer without an ounce of the charisma he brought to his Jolson impersonation. As a criminal type, George Macready seems to think he's still in *GILDA* (1946). Repeating their *JORDAN* roles, Edward Everett Horton appears (and disappears) as angelic Messenger 7013 and James Gleason is once again Max Corle. So off the mark is *DOWN TO EARTH* that a casual joke is made of the fact that, being an agent, Max (the sweetest, warmest, kindest figure in both *JORDAN* and *EARTH*) won't make it to heaven when he dies. Compared to the chances of those who put this unmelodic mess together, Max's chances should be a sure thing!

It's definitely a sure thing that 1944's *COVER GIRL* (Columbia TriStar Home

Entertainment, \$24.95) is a nostalgic, melodic musical tinged with a trace of melancholy. With a lovely score highlighted by the Jerome Kern and Ira Gershwin classic "Long Ago and Far Away," *COVER GIRL* trips nimbly across the screen—in no small measure due to its Terpsichorean leads.

On loan from MGM and filling in for Larry Parks, Gene Kelly offers moves that would later become standard for him. (The number "Make Way for Tomorrow," for instance, foreshadows the back-alley dance in 1955's *IT'S ALWAYS FAIR WEATHER*.) Even Kelly's character name—Danny Maguire—would be used again, when he played Danny in *XANADU* (1980), in itself a remake of *DOWN TO EARTH*. In *COVER GIRL*, Danny meets his match in Rita Hayworth's sultry, decidedly down-to-earth Rusty Parker. As a dancer, Hayworth's in fine form; vocally, she's dubbed by Martha Mears, who more than adequately meets the score's demands.

With the caustic Eve Arden and effervescent Phil Silvers providing expert comic relief, *COVER GIRL* never falters. Columbia's transfer couldn't be better; Hayworth's red mane glistens, the witty dialogue gleams, and the glamor of both the turn-of-the-century sequences and the "modern" forties scenes positively glows.

It's a pity that Columbia didn't shower Technicolor largess on Hayworth's two films with Fred Astaire—*YOU'LL NEVER GET RICH* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, \$19.95) and *YOU WERE NEVER LOVELIER* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, \$24.96). Both musicals deserve the deluxe treatment.

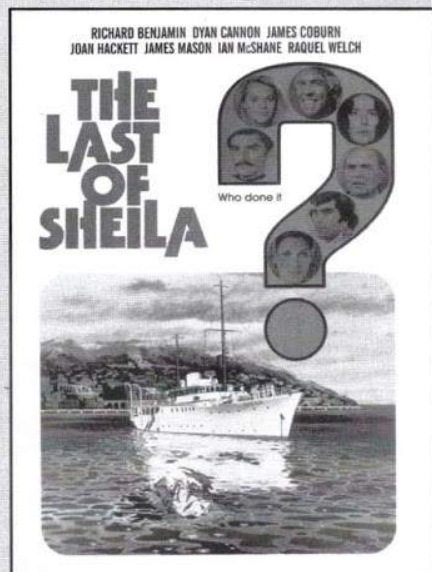
YOU'LL NEVER GET RICH (1941), in particular, looks a trifle shoddy, but that doesn't stop Astaire and Hayworth from dancing up a storm to the plush melodies of a Cole Porter score. Astaire plays Broadway choreographer Robert Curtis, who, after becoming entangled in the romantic shenanigans of producer Martin Cortland (Robert Benchley); Cortland's wife, Julia (Frieda Inescort); and innocent chorus girl Sheila Winthrop (Hayworth), finds himself in the army—and, more often than not, in the stockade.

Porter's score includes "Dream Dancing," the Oscar-nominated "Since I Kissed My Baby Goodbye," and the splendid "So Near and Yet So Far," the last offering the stars their best dance opportunity. *YOU'LL NEVER GET RICH* is as light and airy as *DOWN TO EARTH* is clumsy and flatfooted.

Even better is *YOU WERE NEVER LOVELIER* (1942), which shimmers with one of Jerome Kern's loveliest scores, perfectly matched to Johnny Mercer's flawless lyrics. The film is a remake of *LOS MARTES ORQUIDEAS*, made the previous year in Argentina. Eduardo Acuna (Adolphe Menjou) insists on marrying off his daughters in proper order, and daughter Maria (Hayworth) just isn't ready. Acuna tries to put Maria in a marrying mood by sending her anonymous lover letters and flowers, but blows his stack when the mystery

lover is mistakenly identified as hooper Robert Davis (Astaire). Complications ensue, but they all take a back seat to Astaire and Hayworth's dancing and such timeless tunes as "You Were Never Lovelier," "Dearly Beloved," and "I'm Old Fashioned," each fully deserving of a permanent place in the Great American Songbook.

And what would the Songbook be without the considerable talents of the Great American Musicians—represented by a striking black-and-white transfer of the 1959 biopic *THE GENE KRUPA STORY* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, \$24.96). How much fact is interwoven with the fiction is anyone's guess, but the thematic elements—a choice between the priesthood or music, the rift between parents and chil-



dren, and the upward and downward spirals associated with show business—are made special through the brilliant performance of Sal Mineo as Krupa.

Before lensing began, Mineo studied with Krupa, and the results are awe-inspiring. Even if the music representing thirties jazz is presented through fifties arrangements, the young star is adept at mimicking the rhythms and beats of the film's eclectic score. Mineo is blessed with the matinee idol looks that helped make Krupa a star as well. The film's driving direction comes from an unlikely source: Don Weis, who was responsible for the cheery MGM B musicals *I LOVE MELVIN* and *THE AFFAIRS OF DOBIE GILLIS* (both 1953). With a keen eye for period detail, Weis recreates the Prohibition era's seedy nightclubs and strip clubs, and captures a (then) living legend's self-destructive behavior. The monaural soundtrack features an impressive array of jazz giving Krupa's own invention, the drum kit, its own place in the spotlight. Jazz greats Anita O'Day and Red Nichols appear as themselves, composer Bobby Troup costars as Tommy Dorsey, and future Batgirl Yvonne Craig can be seen in an early role.

The DVD war between Paramount and MGM for Marx Brothers supremacy re-

cently had its first shot fired—by Warner Bros.! *THE MARX BROTHERS COLLECTION* (Warner Home Video, \$59.92) offers five discs containing the MGM comedies *A NIGHT AT THE OPERA* (1935), *A DAY AT THE RACES* (1937), *AT THE CIRCUS* (1939), *GO WEST* (1940), and *THE BIG STORE* (1941), plus RKO's *ROOM SERVICE* (1938) and the United Artist release *A NIGHT IN CASABLANCA* (1946). Though it's heresy to suggest it, at least two of these films (*OPERA* and *RACES*) are equal to the Brothers' five Paramount releases between 1929 and 1933, and are arguably superior to two of them.

Paramount's *THE COCOANUTS* (1929) and *ANIMALS CRACKERS* (1930) contain some of Groucho, Chico, Harpo, and Zeppo's best material, but the Marxes are simply not at the top of their game performance-wise—surprisingly, since they'd played both shows on Broadway and knew the routines backwards and forwards. On the other hand, the contract and stateroom scenes in *OPERA* are sheer comic perfection, and they're matched by *RACES'* tootsie frootsie ice cream, hotel room, and examination scenes. (The comic set pieces of *OPERA* and *RACES* were taken on the road and honed before live audiences, and it shows.)

Though *A NIGHT AT THE OPERA* is the film traditionally crowned with accolades, *A DAY AT THE RACES* proves funnier and gives the lie to the argument that MGM's Irving Thalberg defanged the Marxes and left them entirely too tenderhearted. Despite the famous Thalberg formula, little effort is expended on making the Brothers sympathetic in their quest to help Judy Standish (Maureen O'Sullivan) save her sanitarium from bankruptcy—just a few lines of dialogue here and there. Most of their "help" creates chaos and the sympathetic motive is purely incidental. Put a stop watch to the romantic scenes in *RACES*—scenes that the hero and heroine don't share with one or more Marxes—and you'll find that they take up less screen time than similar and sappier interludes in *THE COCOANUTS* and *ANIMAL CRACKERS*.

The topping on the tootsie frootsie is that honorary Marx—Margaret Dumont—who has one of her best roles in *RACES*, as wealthy hypochondriac Emily Upjohn. Dumont even gets a joke all to herself, when she explains Dr. Hugo Z. Hackenbush's diagnosis that she has high blood pressure on one side of her body and low blood pressure on the other side. (Hackenbush is a horse doctor and—naturally—he's played by Groucho.)

As Susannah Dukesbury, Dumont makes a relatively late entrance in *AT THE CIRCUS*, but it's built up to so brilliantly—with lawyer J. Cheever Loophole (Groucho) storming her mansion—that it becomes an event. Their scenes together are wonderful (*Mrs. Dukesbury*: "Judge Chanock will sit on my left hand, and you will sit on my right

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Hundreds of happy, laughing moviegoers run from the all-consuming terror of *THE BLOB* (1958).

LOVE THAT BLOB

Continued from page 53

Eventually, the disparate age groups sort of meet each other halfway—but, as in the original, the problem of communication between generations must first be solved. This happens gradually, as the reports of disappearances and hungry protoplasm become too great to ignore. In one uncharacteristically well-filmed shot, we watch the sheriff's face in closeup as the phones in his office start ringing, and keep ringing in what becomes an endless monotonal cacophony. The camera revolves slowly around him as he is unable to move or react in any way but complete, stoic inaction. (Sheriff Jones is a far cry from Lieutenant Dave.) In antithesis of the hippies who are too cool to care about any real threat, Jones is too rooted in the normal world to grasp a "non-real" threat like a killer from space. Finally he springs into action, and even turns cool when two of the hipsters want to help out and he tells them to "get some jackets and helmets and try and look official." Unfortunately, by the end—with the Blob frozen in the skating rink and the TV cameras propped around him—the sheriff reverts to his old ways as a white male over 30 who can't be trusted. Making a pompous speech, he grabs all the credit for the victory and starts lying about having been on the phone with the president. The camera lights melt a hole in the ice, letting just enough Blob through to get on the sheriff's shoe. Unlike the first film's hopeful reunification, *BEWARE! THE BLOB*'s conclusion reveals that, yes, in a crisis, we all might work together, but that once the dust settles, it's back to giving each other hotfoots while consuming themselves in orgies of self-absorbed navel-gazing.

As hit or miss as the telling of this little tale is, this lysergic time capsule provides a field day for fans of sixties-seventies hipster comedy. Not only is it a pleasure to see groundbreaking comedian Cambridge, but it's also a great opportunity to dig that honey-toned hipster Shelley Berman, who has a hilarious bit as a "hair sculptor" who almost bilks a stoned hippie out of \$400 (before the Blob comes up through the sink for a hair-raising climax). In addition to Cort, Graham, Meredith, Hagman, and Williams, there are also appearances by Second City Improv founder Del Close, Dick Stahl (as bowling alley/skating rink owner Edward Fazio, *BEWARE!*'s civilian authority figure), and Altman veteran Danny Goldman. Tiger Joe Marsh—the model for Mr. Clean—shows up as The Naked Turk, running nude through the streets when he spots the Blob approaching his bathtub.

As a cinematic relic, *BEWARE! THE BLOB* is valuable because it's relatively unmarred by commercial pretensions. It is at still too early in the crazy seventies for the cinema to become homogenized into multiplexes, but, in the context of the film itself, the improv-followed-by-cliché horror action prefigures the multiplex trend of homogenized sameness. Every improvisatory, Altmanesque new direction is relegated to the Blob's gaping "mouth," till the climax finds us completely in generic horror territory, with Bobby, Lisa, and Fazio trapped in the rink's control room (this film's substitution for the diner of the original) and the cops sneaking slowly through the alley in search of their elusive, oversized prey. In this way, *BEWARE!* serves as a portent of the closed-off genre filmmaking that would mark the end of the Altmanesque seventies cinema; it starts out a poor man's *M*A*S*H* and ends up a poor man's *JAWS* (1975).

It's the *JAWS* phenomenon that is blamed for the death of seventies cinema. Nevertheless, despite the on-rushing prevalence of sameness, it's really only in the late eighties—the post-*TERMINATOR* (1984) universe—that pop culture goes truly post-modern and begins to feed on itself like a serpent on its tail. Increasingly, film dialogue became an alternative to actual conversation ("I'll be back.") and filmmakers no longer felt the need to hide their "homages" to the themes and concepts of earlier films. Instead, they openly celebrated their influences. Clearly, it was Blob Time once again.

Nineteen-eighty-eight's *THE BLOB* is not just a remake of the original, but rather a remake of lots of horror films and themes, copped freely from a wealth of styles and sources. There's a little John Carpenter in the music and setup, some *TERMINATOR* in the credits and giddy forward "it can't be stopped" momentum, a dash of teen sex comedy, a dose of Francis Ford Coppola's *THE OUTSIDERS* and *RUMBLE FISH* (both 1983), a little *ALIEN* (1979) government coverup, a little telephone booth homage to *THE BIRDS* (1963), and so on. It's a big, absorbing Blob of a film. While the original Blob stayed pretty red and opaque as it grew, this Blob remains sufficiently clear for us to see the still-twitching edibles dissolving inside it. Similarly, no reference or borrow is concealed, but rather pointed out and celebrated. It's a horror film as referential guide to other films, especially the big hits of previous years. In the *BLOB* remake's wake, each new horror film winkingly, openly acknowledged its sources.

The film opens with a view of outer space before descending on a small, deserted USA town. We pan past numerous angel statues and closed stores and businesses (including a movie theater) and wonder where the people are, while the Carpenteresque music plays and *TERMINATOR*-font credits flash. Has the Blob already struck? Or have you wandered into a colorized version of *THE LAST PICTURE SHOW* (1971)?

The deserted town with the autumn leaves blowing through it also recalls the establishing scenes of Carpenter's *HALLOWEEN* (1979). A cat wandering through the streets recalls the doomed pussy from the opening of *BEWARE! THE BLOB*. From this established sense of emptiness, we abruptly pan to a football game, where the whole town seems to have gathered, reacting as a big, pregelatinous mass to the action on the muddy field. We soon meet cheerleader Meg Penny (Shawnee Smith) and football star Paul Taylor (Donovan Leitch). Their romance seems like the central one of the film, but our genre expectations will not be met. Whereas Steve in the original managed to embody both the normal guy and the anti-hero rebel, here the character is split. The rebel is actually outside society altogether. He's not at the game; he's off in the woods trying to jump an abandoned

bridge on his motorbike. His name is Brian Flagg, and he's played by Kevin Dillon (memorable as the homophobic bad boy in 1985's *HEAVEN HELP US*). We like him right off the bat, because when he crashes his bike and a weird old coot (Billy Beck, in the Olin Howlin' role) applauds, Brian smiles wryly back. He's instantly established as a friend of the outsider. He is himself already cast out, but his high white collar and ornate black motorcycle jacket let us know he's not afraid to let his eighties freak flag fly.

As in the original *BLOB*, there's plenty of rich, interesting character detail delegated to even minor, soon-to-be-absorbed characters. The story is set in a ski town suffering from an off-season economic slump. Herb Geller (Jeffrey DeMunn) is the rough but fair sheriff who hangs out at the local bar and woos the tough but sweet proprietress, Fran Hewitt (seventies favorite Candy Clark, who embodied the fifties in 1973's *AMERICAN GRAFFITI*). Then there's the cool black mechanic, Moss Woodley (Beau Billingslea), who is a friend to Brian, loaning him tools to fix his moped. The mood established is very John Carpenter, with a sense of profound desolation, as if the scattered occupants of the town are just waiting for some sort of nightmarish deliverance. But the film soon begins borrowing from other sources as well. The football jocks, for example, are operating in eighties sex comedy mode, with the inevitable condom-buying scene, as Paul accompanies fellow player Scott Jeske (Ricky Paull Goldin) to Rexall Drugs to buy prophylactics, running into nosy Reverend Meeker (Del Close, also in *BEWARE! THE BLOB*). Worse, the owner of the store turns out to be Meg's dad (Art LaFleur). Bad jock Scott Jeske now has his condoms and good jock Paul has taken the blame—but if you think all this precoital byplay is going to lead anywhere, you're sadly mistaken. As in *BEWARE!*, the characters are set up only to be knocked down like bowling pins.

A post-modern sense of preordained doom dominates the film, with Meg's little brother, Kevin (Michael Kenworthy), and his friend, Eddie Beckner (Douglas Emerson), at home wanting to go see *GARDEN TOOL MAS-SACRE*. (Eddie explains, "Your basic slice and dice.") We know in our hearts that the theater will be ground zero for the Blob's big public debut. A familiarity with the original is assumed in director Chuck Russell and Frank Daramont's script, which then tweaks our expectations at every turn in a game of "guess that homage," borrowing just as much from other sources as it does from the original. We think the story is going to zig like the 1958 original, but then it zags, like *ALIENS* (1986).

Driving to their date, Meg and Paul nearly run over the old man with the blobbified hand, who is being pursued by Brian. The three teenagers take the old man to the hospital. The small town doctor who knew Steve by name in the 1958 version is here replaced by a big, impersonal institution, a medical McDonalds compared to the hamburger joint of the general practitioner. (No doctor actually shows up at all in *BEWARE! THE BLOB*, which is too busy zipping from one riff to another to set up any kind of storyline. The sole authority figure present in that film is embodied in the sheriff, whose control hangs by a thread thanks to the drug-enhanced freedom of the voters.) In the 1988 remake, authority has more or less ceased to work at all, especially in the hospital, where a sullen nurse (Margaret Smith) can barely raise an eyebrow at the howling old man. Authority has grown complacent in the face of no independent competition. Brian has to cause a pretty major commotion in the waiting room just to be able to see the doctor (Jack Nance). When Paul goes to check on the old man, he's already devoured. Paul is not far behind, and before long the place is a blood-bath. With Brian the only suspect, Sheriff Geller locks

him up on general suspicion, illustrating again the incompetence of authority. ("Round up the usual suspects.") Again, it's a matter of communication, and the gap between ages and subcultures is what allows the Blob to run unchecked. Geller doesn't believe the teenagers, who are probably just pulling a "prank." In the previous decade, the straights wouldn't believe the heads, and vice versa, and that damage has never been repaired. No one trusts anyone else anymore, allowing the giant threat to seep through.

We now arrive at the obligatory makeout scene, with Scott (from his look and behavior having seemingly absorbed John Travolta's Danny Zuko character from 1978's *GREASE*) hoping to use his condoms on the unsuspecting Vicky (Erika Eleniak). They're parked in his car, a little too close to the hospital for their own good. Scott leaves the front seat for a few moments in order to make a drink in the car trunk's portable bar. When he returns and unbuttons Vicky's blouse, the Blob shoots out of it and devours him. (Vicky is already dead.) This is not really a functional metaphor for some kind of repressed sex drive, or STD. Rather, it is a signifier of other films, where the monster does represent these things. The Blob is just a stand-in. Like Steve's absorption of James Dean at the beginning of the original, the Blob has absorbed the mannerisms of a dozen other film monsters.

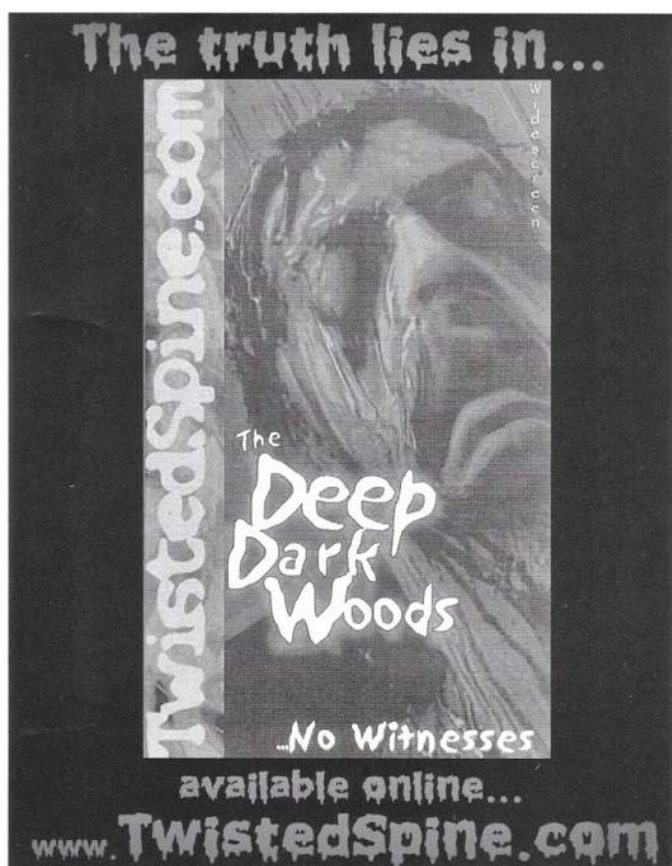
Back home, Meg's trauma is conveniently ignored by her parents. Mom (Sharon Spelman) is a Stepford wife who, when Meg asks, "You don't believe me, do you?", answers, "You're home now; that's all that matters." She is already absorbed, gone, emotionally unavailable. Meanwhile, Brian is being questioned by Sheriff Geller and the teen-hating Deputy Bill Briggs (Paul McCrane), who all but clocks Brian in the face. To his credit, Geller releases Brian, much to the displeasure of Briggs. Soon, Brian is cooling down in Fran's diner. Meg finds him there. "I need your help," she says.

"Three years in school you never said shit to me," he replies. The central Blob theme of lack of communication is here brought fully into the light. Generations can't communicate, but neither can different high school groups. The Blob is allowed to move as it pleases because no one has the channel open.

"You put on a big show, but you're the same as everybody else," Meg fumes, causing the boy to apologize. Brian proves to be a hero because he's willing to break the silence. He's a friend to the old man, the black man, the diner owner, and the boyfriendless Meg. Unlike Steve in the original, however, Brian has little chance of being reabsorbed into the community. The cops hate him on general principle; genuine rebellious energy has been forever banned from the stale society. He can only ride in like an outlaw wanted for a crime he didn't commit, saving the lives of the ignorant townspeople eager to destroy him.

Ultimately, Brian's heroics do not really transform him, either. He's able to turn himself into a motorbike-riding action hero with relative ease, as if all he ever needed was a monster to give him the chance. The menace is not a herald of sameness. Here, the Blob is a collection of monsterness, which, like the Blob in *BEWARE!*, serves the function of cliché creator, reducing original situations and characters to their basic elements. Some of the characters become traditional heroes; most become gore special effects. Either way, the movie climaxes as it must—with the townsfolk running from and/or being devoured by a shapeless mass.

Defying expectations born of the first two films, the sheriff dies early on, and the actual authority figure who fills up the remaining screen time is the seemingly sweet-natured, silver-bearded chief of the mili-

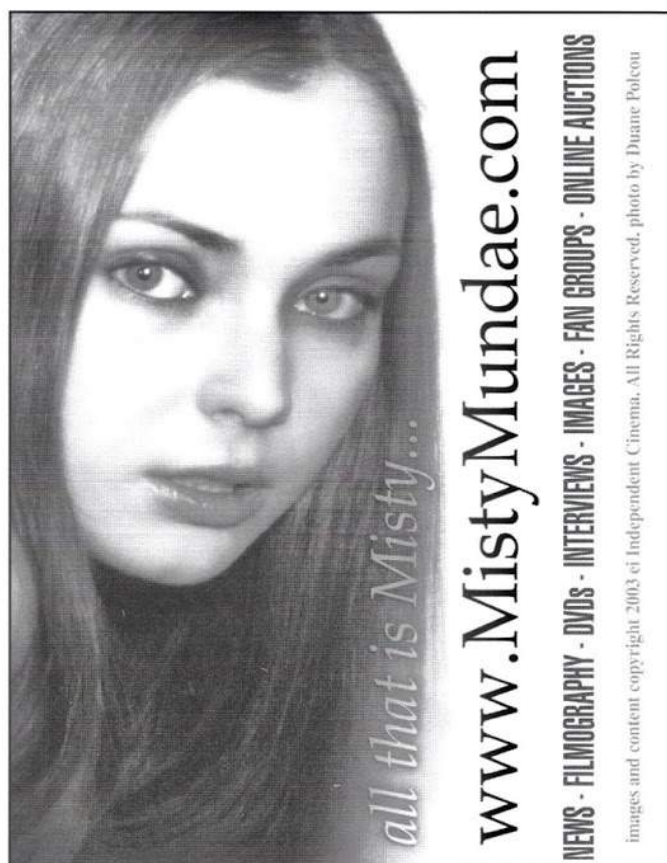


tary unit, Dr. Meddows (Joe Seneca). The casting of an old, white-haired, "gentle" African-American in this role is nicely subversive. Clichéd as the film can be, it takes full advantage of our genre expectations and then turns them against us. At first, Meddows appears to Meg and Brian as a godsend come to explain what is going on. He's the friendly scientific explanation provider—Professor Elson (Cecil Kellaway) in *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* (1953), Dr. Medford (Edmund Gwenn) in *THEM!* (1954). Instead, it turns out that he's actually the villain of the piece, more than willing to sacrifice the entire town in order to contain the Blob as a chemical weapon—aka Ash (Ian Holm), the robot in *ALIEN*.

In the original *BLOB* and its sequel, there was still some optimism that, once the cops stopped prejudging and the youths stopped screwing around, the youths themselves could assume authority positions and inherit the mantle of the world. By 1988, such dreams were long gone. The moral—you can't trust anyone in authority, period, not unless the Blob envelops them first in its big Marxist group hug.

In a sequel to the original film, the Blob attacks the movie house. Meg, Kevin, and Eddie (the boys have snuck off to the movie) hide in the sewers as the Blob comes after them. (It gets Eddie.) Once the monster emerges from the underground, it decimates the military and quickly gobbles down Meddows.

Eventually, everyone takes refuge in the town library, where Reverend Meeker starts nattering about the day of judgement in homage to *WAR OF THE WORLDS* (1953) and Deputy Briggs is grabbed, folded in half, and devoured by the Blob. Conveniently, there's a snow-making machine idling in Moss' garage, and it is this that Brian uses to ram the now-giant creature and—with Meg's help—save the day. The sprinkling of snow over the scene symbolizes possible future economic salvation for the town, and perhaps Brian's reacceptance into society, where he might assume a leader position. However, the traditional Blob open ending—symbolized by a



question mark at the conclusion of the first two films—must be provided. It comes in the form of crackpot Reverend Meeker, now holding old-fashioned tent revivals of the sort seen in *X—THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES* (1963), prophesying about the end of the world, a jar-sized sample of the Blob quivering in his back office.

That would seem to be it for the Blob, though it still appears in song and story. In 1990, a group of left-coast comedians known as the L.A. Connection redubbed the original, giving it the title *BLOBBERMOUTH*. Aside from a few clever gags and music inserts, however, it's a pretty juvenile affair. Meanwhile, the town of Phoenixville, PA, presents the Blob Festival every year, which culminates with festival goers crowding into the Colonial Theater where the original Blob attack scene was shot and, on cue, running out of the theater, screaming en masse. The original song by Burt Bacharach and Mack David was rerecorded for *Scarlet Street's* recent CD titled *JEEPERS CREEPERS: GREAT SONGS FROM HORROR FILMS*. (See pages 16 and 17.) The popularity of the film is well-documented, so it can't be doubted that there's something subtextually intriguing in the subject.

Perhaps the Blob's staying power is a result of how it deals with some pertinent issues concerning America, a young nation so obsessed with profit and comfort that it's forever in danger of losing its compass. Small towns especially must suffer the insecurities of being "swallowed up." The site of the small American town lies between two worlds—the city and the country, fullness and emptiness. The towns invaded in all three films are neither rural nor urban, but suburban—a nether zone constantly in transition, constantly being expanded, filled in, developed. Anyone who has ever driven back to the small town in which they grew up, only to find that it's not there anymore, knows what it feels like to be Blobbified. It's the same all over the country, as quaint little towns are engulfed in suburban sprawls, mom and pop shops are put out of business by a corporate juggernaut that swallows up everything in order to

leave its giant, shapeless Wal Marts behind like so many prehistoric droppings.

We're a nation whose culture is so soaked in media and entertainment that teens today get corporate logos as tattoos. Clearly, the Blob has won, and individual thinking has all but been replaced by a kind of super-dogma of infotainment. This has been reflected in Westerns, with the "vanishing frontier" of such films as *THE WILD BUNCH* (1973), and lately in domestic dramas with the downsizing corporations casting out their rebels in grand *AMERICAN BEAUTY* (1999) fashion, leaving them with no choice but to flip up their middle finger and die by the roadside. The true rebel is shunned and feared by a nation that originally was built by the likes of him—but that nation has since been consumed and now, itself, consumes. Steve, Brian, and the hippies all take on the Blob of mindless consumerism, but they do so more or less alone. The leaders who may have taken us out of this mess have all been either assassinated or discredited. We blame shadowy conspiracies, but it is ultimately we, the devoured, so snug in our rose-tinted placenta, who are to blame. The giant, death-drive dissolving womb that takes us deeper and deeper into the morass of ambivalence is hard to resist. That plasmatic, fantastic glop eagerly absorbs any new, byte-sized bit of freshness that comes along, reacting violently only to such real threats as individuality, recoiling from the coolness of dangerous minds as if from a hot flame.

The imagined and hoped for result of a menace from outer space—that such a menace would unite all the nations of the world against a common enemy—comes true only in the original *BLOB*. It unites all age groups, who, working together, listening to one another, even breaking stuff together, find themselves in defense against a common foe, the foe being commonness itself. Is it any surprise that the generation gap is wider than ever today, in an era in which the Blob has won? The dreamlike *BLOB* of 1958 was perhaps the last attempt to bring parents and teenagers together. From that point on, cinema would work for the Blob, and drive the wedge deeper. Perhaps one day there will be another Steve to point out the fragile, surreal world of forever-night that we inhabit.

Or perhaps not . . .

TWILIGHT OF THE HORROR GODS

Continued from page 45

lizing clues, such as the comments by Hayward, but the biographer never follows those clues to a possible solution to the enigma of Whale's decline and death. Curtis, of course, was playing by the rules laid down by David Lewis.

Viewed in this light, James Whale's last years as a filmmaker become particularly poignant. Here we have a man who created some of the greatest films of all time going over the edge—and doing so for no other reason than the fact that he was trying to hide his true nature. It's a tragedy that those film historians so fond of trying to minimize Whale's sexuality and so prone to suggesting that gay people should keep their mouths shut on the topic might—but probably won't—stop and consider. Why, they ask, must this topic be addressed? Here's the answer. Not only did the keep-it-under-wraps mindset damage Whale the man, it quite possibly robbed us of the chance for more Whale films on the level of *WATERLOO BRIDGE* (1931), *FRANKENSTEIN* (1931), *THE OLD DARK HOUSE* (1932), *THE INVISIBLE MAN* (1933), *ONE MORE RIVER* (1934), *REMEMBER LAST NIGHT?* (1935), *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935), and *SHOW BOAT* (1936).

Tragic, indeed . . .



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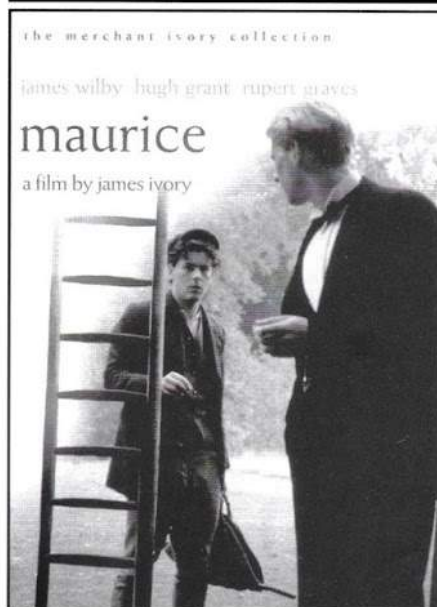
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SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 30

hind her is derailed when the Emersons move into the neighborhood, leaving her with the choice of a comfortable, socially acceptable life with Cecil or a passionate, full life with George.

Merchant Ivory followed the success of *ROOM* with *MAURICE* (1987). Written during 1913-14, the novel wasn't published until after Forster's death in 1970, due to the subject matter. As Maurice Hall (James Wilby) approaches adulthood, he realizes a fact about himself that must remain hidden—he is homosexual. Attending Cambridge, he finds a kindred spirit in Clive Durham (Hugh Grant), but after a few passionate moments Clive insists their friendship remain platonic. Maurice accepts the limitation for three years, until a gay scandal frightens Clive into feigned heterosexuality. Devastated, adrift and alone from the rejection, Maurice cycles through denial and attempts at "cures" until an encounter at Clive's estate solidifies Maurice's true feelings. There he meets—and beds—groundskeeper Alec Scudder (Rupert Graves). Afterwards, the fear of blackmail causes Maurice to withdraw, in spite of Scudder's further advances. His true nature proves too strong and he seeks out Scudder in the hopes of a fulfilling life.

Both films showcase producer Merchant and director Ivory at the height of their art. Exquisitely cast and filmed at gorgeous locations, the Edwardian period of the novels is perfectly reproduced. *ROOM* is as much a joy to watch the 10th time as the first. The magnificent dialogue (adapted from the novel by Ruth Praver-Jhabvala) is delivered with joyful aplomb by the cast—especially by Smith in her "vexed" performance as Charlotte.

MAURICE (adapted by Kit Hesketh-Harvey) isn't nearly as lighthearted, but ultimately it's every inch as uplifting. Its story of those who learn to accept their gender preference and others who choose to deny it is as timely now as when Forster wrote it. The film is a beautiful depiction of a love that has to overcome boundaries of both class and sexuality. *MAURICE* remains one of the best and most positive gay-themed films of all time.

Both DVDs look and sound superb, utilizing restored elements, properly matted and enhanced for widescreen TVs. The extras are satisfying. *ROOM* contains a commentary by Merchant, Ivory, actor Simon Callow, and cinematographer Tony Pierce-Roberts that is entertaining and informative, if a little sparse in the latter half. It also offers promo footage from the original release, a Merchant/Ivory career overview, a stills gallery, and a BBC memorial on Forster broadcast shortly after his death.

MAURICE contains two interview featurettes—one with the main actors, the other with the filmmakers. There is also a large number of deleted scenes, mostly cut for time and containing crucial moments from the novel. A slight air of hypocrisy surrounds the interviews, though. The actors express pride at having received letters from gay people who were profoundly moved by the film, yet we still have to hear about the "difficulties" they had in approaching the male-on-male love scenes. (Graves takes a full step backward from his onetime assertion that he's 30% gay.) Similarly, the filmmakers are glad to have made a gay film with a positive ending and a theme of being true to one's self, yet none of them take the opportunity to be fully open about their own lives.

In spite of that reservation, the excellent presentation on both DVDs is highly recommended.

—Ron Morgan

PETER GUNN

Volumes One and Two
A&E Home Video—\$39.95 each

The plots aren't much, nor does gumshoe Peter Gunn (Craig Stevens) do much detecting—he seems to rely more on hunches and convenient confessions—but plots and detective work aren't why you'd watch the 1958-61 TV series *PETER GUNN*. This visually distinctive series (shadowy TV *noir* at its best) was created by up-and-coming film auteur Blake Edwards, who here first united with up-and-coming smooth jazz composer Henry Mancini. The two make a formidable pair, giving this 114-episode series an unusual edge.

PETER GUNN is nominally about detective Gunn, the well-dressed, supercool P.I., who never seems fazed by anything. But it is really about recycling Dashiell Hammett/Raymond Chandler-style goings-on through a TV

screen darkly. Mancini's syncopated rhythms, smooth and dreamy, reflect the bizarre world of Gunn and his cronies, which is always seen at night, late at night. In fact, Gunn wears the evening like a suit of clothes—you rarely see him during the day—and is always immaculately dressed in a dark business suit, his hair rarely mussed, his coolness never disturbed.

The gumshoe encounters a family of regulars on almost every episode: the nightclub hostess known as Mother (Hope Emerson), who runs (naturally) "Mother's," Gunn's unofficial office; the lounge singer/girlfriend Edie Hart (Lola Albright), perennially smiling, waiting, and hoping Pete will choose her over a case; and the grouchy-but-always-there-in-a-pinch Lieutenant Jacoby (Herschel Bernardi), one step behind Gunn all the way.

And the mysteries? Many episodes are either written or directed by Edwards, and reflect his obsession with those mean streets that Chandler's Philip Marlowe (and Edwards' own radio dick, Richard Diamond) strode. The stories usually start off with a bizarrely intriguing killing, such as during the



offbeat opening of "The Blind Pianist." In that, a blind jazz pianist (Barney Phillips) plays at a nearly empty nightspot while the sole patron is strangled to death by a stranger in black gloves.

The stories concern the violent passions lurking beneath the complacency of fifties life. "Streetcar Jones" finds Gunn investigating the death of a jazz musician; "The Vicious Dog" is about a killer (Paul Dubov) who uses a nasty pooch to go after a newspaperman (Tyler McVey); "The Kill" features vigilantes dressed as cops (there's a scene that was duplicated in the 1973 *Dirty Harry* film *MAGNUM FORCE*); while "The Frog" is about a well-dressed gangster (Whit Bissell) who beats up people with his cane.

Love and death are invariably intertwined in Gunn's world, with many of

the mysteries centering around jealous gangsters who kill rival suitors for a melancholy girl's affection ("The Chinese Hangman," "Lynn's Blues," "Rough Buck"). And, in the best *noir* tradition, Gunn always loves Edie faithfully but loves danger more. As they are about to kiss, the case inevitably beckons and the gumshoe is off into the night, but not without a wry exchange. *She*: "They say patience is a virtue." *He*: "Who?" *She*: "Patient, virtuous people."

The two-set, four-volume DVD release features 32 episodes. The quality is fine, about as good as you could expect for a nearly 50-year-old series. There is an interactive Peter Gunn trivia game and, of course, Mancini's Grammy-winning theme.

—Tom Soter

MYRA BRECKINRIDGE

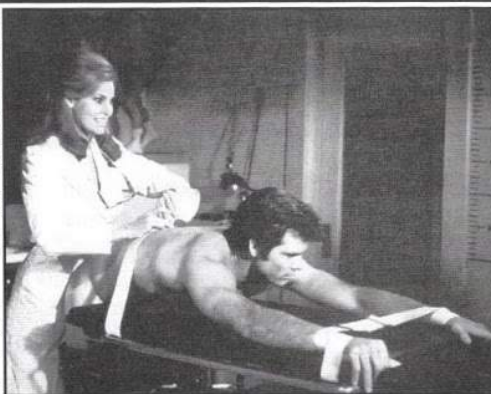
20th Century Fox Video—\$14.95

Everything you've heard is true—MYRA BRECKINRIDGE (1970) is a truly bad film. I'm saying this right now, to save you the trouble of having to infer it. Now that I've said it, I'm also going to strongly recommend this fascinating DVD, because the stories behind MYRA BRECKINRIDGE are far more interesting (and watchable) than the movie.

Based on the 1968 novel by Gore Vidal, this is the story of Myron Breckinridge (Rex Reed), who has a quack doctor (John Carradine) perform a sex-change operation on him. As Myra, Myron (now played by Raquel Welch) goes to Hollywood with the notion of destroying the male gender, whatever the hell that means. MYRA's plot lurches forward, as she tries to bilk an acting-school impresario (John Huston); irritate an apparently half-blind, sex-crazed 70-something talent agent (Mae West); bed a starlet (Farrah Fawcett), and anally assault a testosterone-impaired idiot (Roger Herren). The plot is punctuated, randomly, with clips from the 20th Century Fox vaults. What all this leads up to doesn't matter much. By the time it all unfolds, the narrative has become so incomprehensible that no one before or behind the camera seems to give a damn.

What makes this DVD so worthwhile are its extras. There are two versions of the movie on the double-sided disc, a "special edition" and the theatrical release print. Each has a commentary track. One is by director Michael Sarne, who comes off as borderline delusional and paranoid, blaming the movie's many problems on everyone but himself. The second, by Raquel Welch, is a delight; she's smart, sassy, and funny, apologizing from time to time for the quality of the movie. ("Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time," she laments.) And there's an AMC BACKSTORY documentary, too, which details how this movie went horribly, horribly wrong.

In short, almost everything one could want to know about the making and



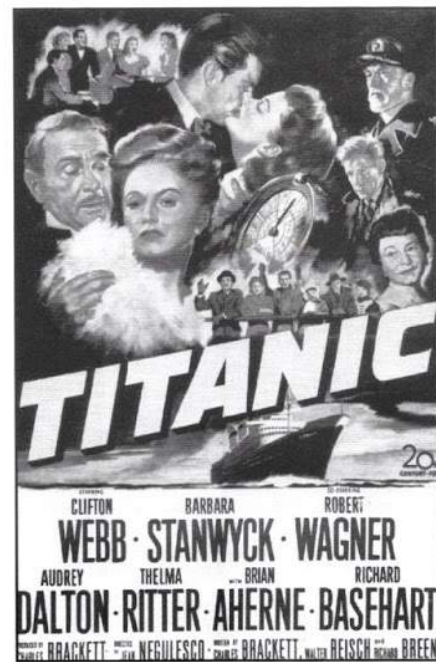
breaking of this movie is documented on this disc, and that's the story worth telling. Conspicuous by his absence is Gore Vidal himself, who disowned the film. One can hardly blame him. His novel was a scandalous, highly acclaimed best-seller. By any measure, the film richly deserves its place in the history of wretched sex-change movies, right next to GLEN OR GLENDA? (1953) and THE CHRISTINE JORGENSEN STORY (1970).

—Robin Anderson

TITANIC

20th Century Fox Home Video—\$14.98

"Titanic in emotion, spectacle, cast, and climax," promised ads for this 1953 film, and it certainly delivered. Director Jean Negulesco and stars Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck (as Richard Ward Sturges and Julia Sturges) are not just going through their paces here. Working from an Oscar-winning script by Charles Brackett and Richard L. Breen and with support from Thelma Ritter (as the Unsinkable Molly Brown, renamed Maude Young for this movie), Brian Aherne (as Captain Smith), and Richard



Basehart (as George Headley, a disgraced priest), TITANIC is a joy to watch.

Julia Sturges is trying to escape her purposeless life as the wife of a continent-hopping bon vivant. She is taking their children, Annette (Audrey Dalton) and Norman (Harper Carter), back to her home state of Michigan. Husband Richard finds out at the last minute and arranges passage on the same ship—the Titanic. He's proud of his children and even dreams of a title international marriage for Annette. Instead, she falls in love with college boy Gifford Rogers (Robert Wagner). Julia gives up on Annette, but claims Norman, going so far as to tell Richard the truth—he is not Norman's father. (The separation scene is played to perfection by Webb and Stanwyck.) Looming ahead, of course, is doom in the form of a gigantic iceberg.

The son of a stand-in on the Fox lot, Harper Carter gives a moving and natural performance as Norman, in what is the most tragic of the film's intertwining stories. He later appeared in two Elvis Presley films—G.I. BLUES (1960) and SPEEDWAY (1968)—but seems to have given up acting.

The film contains some inaccuracies: an underwater scene shows the iceberg striking the ship on the wrong side, bells and warning whistles blare when none actually sounded, and the end comes calmly to those left aboard. The Titanic is also shown sinking (in the thinking of the time) in one piece.

The DVD transfer offers rich blacks, grays, and whites, and the sound is crisp. Presented in 1.33:1 original full frame and stereo, the featurette BEYOND TITANIC offers many glimpses of the ship as it appeared in other motion pictures. A Movietone newsreel of the 1953 Academy Award ceremony and a small still gallery are included. There is a commentary by historian Sylvia Stoddard, cinematographer Michael Lonza, and performers Audrey Dalton and Robert Wagner. Comments by Wagner and Dalton were obviously recorded at different times. Dalton comes off best, although both are generous in their praise of their older costars. (Wagner was, at the time, the protégé of gay star Clifton Webb.)

And by the way, Fox, the dance Dalton and Wagner perform is the Navajo Rag, not the Navajo Rug, as the Chapter Stop calls it!

—Jack Randall Earles

THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

20th Century Fox Home Video—\$14.98

We have all lived the vicarious trauma of plane crashes by way of the movies, wondering what we would do in similar circumstances should we survive a wreck and be forced to spend time stranded with people we wouldn't think of speaking to on the actual flight. As

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LEGACY OF HORROR

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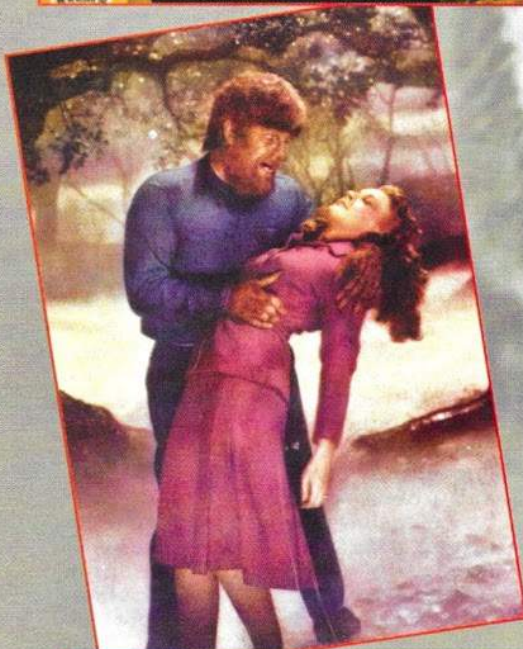
THE FRANKENSTEIN LEGACY

THE DRACULA LEGACY

THE WOLF MAN LEGACY

Universal—\$26.98 each

Regardless of what one thinks of Stephen Sommers' *VAN HELSING* (2004), it's



undeniable that its release was the impetus for Universal bringing out four box sets of the entire run of the central films—insofar as monsters who aren't invisible or the Mummy are concerned (it's Kharis' own fault for never having hobnobbed with any of the other monsters)—comprising the studio's claim to fame in the realm of classic horror. Here, at last, are DVD incarnations of all the studio's serious (read: no 1948's *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN*) monster movies, from *DRACULA* (1931) through *HOUSE OF DRACULA* (1945), with the questionable bonus of one post-*HOUSE* film, *SHE-WOLF OF LONDON* (1946), which the studio seems to think has to go somewhere. (One can imagine better places—usually involving landfills).

In addition to the all-encompassing *LEGACY COLLECTION* containing every release, the films have been grouped into three sets—*Dracula*, *Frankenstein* (meaning the *Monster*, of course), and the *Wolf Man*. *THE DRACULA LEGACY* contains the Tod Browning *DRACULA*, the George Melford Spanish-language *DRACULA* (1931), *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER* (1936), Robert Siodmak's noirish *SON OF DRACULA* (1943), and *HOUSE OF DRACULA*, along with special features, including David J. Skal's *THE ROAD TO DRACULA* documentary, an audio commentary by Skal on *DRACULA*, an introduction to the Spanish *DRACULA* by star Lupita Tovar, a promotional featurette for *VAN HELSING* with Stephen Sommers, posters, photos, trailers, and the Philip Glass score for the reissue of the Browning film. *THE FRANKENSTEIN LEGACY* boasts James Whale's *FRANKENSTEIN* (1931) and *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935), *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1939), *THE GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN*, and *HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* with Skal documentaries on *FRANKENSTEIN* and *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, commentaries on *FRANKENSTEIN* (by Rudy Behlmer) and *BRIDE* (by Scott MacQueen), and a similar range of stills, trailers, etc. *THE WOLF MAN LEGACY* consists of *WEREWOLF OF LONDON* (1935), *THE WOLF MAN* (1941), *FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN* (1943), and *SHE-WOLF OF LONDON*, plus the documentary, *MONSTER BY MOONLIGHT*, a *WOLF MAN* commentary (by Tom Weaver),

but fewer other extras than its sister sets.

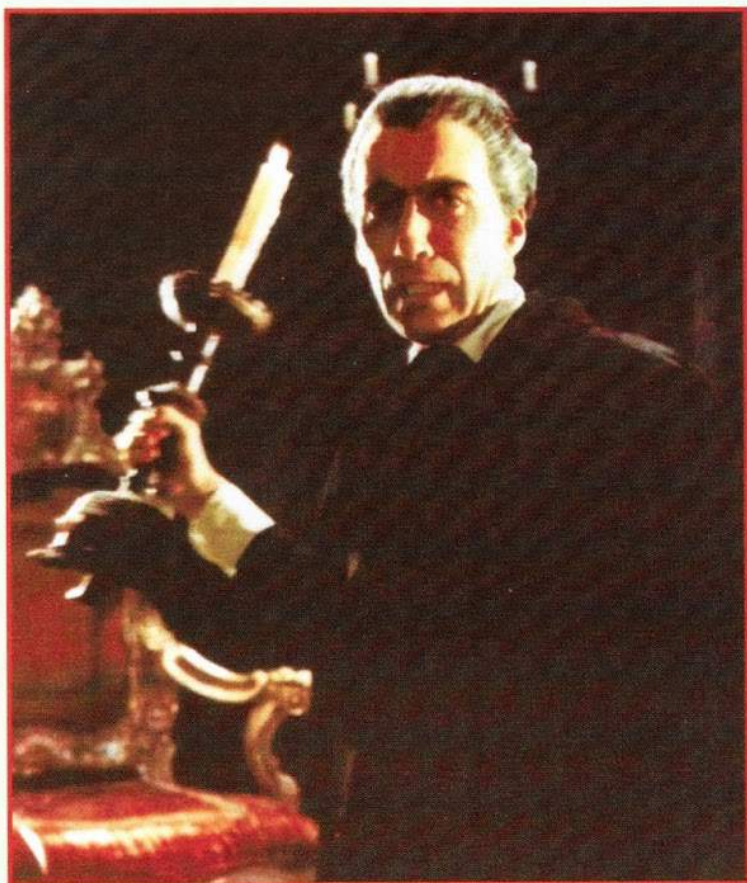
Apart from the inclusion of *HOUSE OF DRACULA* in the *DRACULA LEGACY*, there's nothing new here, although the sets are better organized and a better value than Universal's former bare-bones double-feature offerings. For anyone who eschewed those, the *Legacy Sets* are a boon, even though they're something of a mixed boon—and occasionally not a very honest one. For example, the claims of "original trailers" are just plain false in the cases of *DRACULA* and *FRANKENSTEIN*, which, as usual, are the same old Realart reissue trailers we've been seeing since day one.

Another downside is the source print used—apparently accidentally—for *DRACULA*. Somehow we've ended up with an older copy of the film than the one used on the first DVD release and the laserdisc. Those, at least, had the advantage of a restored soundtrack that put back the screams from Renfield's murder and *Dracula's* staking that had been censored in theatrical reissues. The new release finds us back to the unrestored track. On the plus side, this version does contain the opening of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony, which follows Lugosi's "There are far worse things awaiting man than death" speech. Previously, the Symphony was really *Unfinished*—it was entirely missing from the original DVD (possibly a casualty of preparing the film for the abysmal Philip Glass score). The irony here is that the old laserdisc remains the closest thing we have to a definitive version of this, the granddaddy of the modern horror film!

There has been considerable talk that the new transfer of *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* corrects the too-tight framing of the original DVD release, but at best it can be said only to improve on it. Frankly, there is little difference between the two.

In general, the transfers—*DRACULA* to one side—are on a par with the earlier DVD incarnations, but hardly represent a major improvement over the original DVD releases. As such, the sets are primarily of interest to those who haven't already bought the films, are very high on the completist scale, or want to buy the entire set (not the three individual *Legacies*) in order to get the admittedly handsome and well-crafted busts of Lugosi, Boris Karloff, and Lon Chaney Jr. (though the Lugosi's bust reminds one more of Martin Landau as Lugosi than it does of Lugosi himself). There's no denying that the overall presentation is handsome, but

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VAN HELSING THE MAN WHO SLEW TOO MUCH

Continued from page 38

to women, but also with enormous strength, with physical strength."

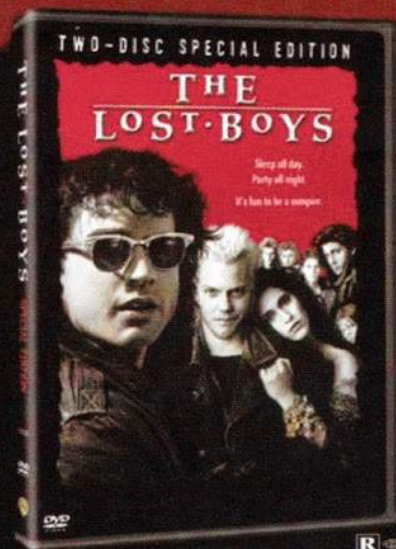
It wasn't only Dracula who "got physical" via Hammer. Revamping Van Helsing as a younger, energetic opponent made it possible for him to play a more active role in Dracula's climactic destruction, which now included the vampire hunter's mad dash along a lengthy table and desperate leap onto the window curtains. (It's noteworthy that at no time in Hammer's first Dracula film is the Count actually staked. Instead, he goes all to pieces when Van Helsing pulls down the curtains and floods the castle with sunlight.) It was a far cry from Stoker's original concept, but it was impossible to deny the thrill it generated.

"It would have been a pity not to have it," said Cushing of the stunt, "because I always think that sort of excitement is wonderful in a film. And one's got to bear in mind that not all that many people would have read the book, would they? Of all the millions of people who go to the theater, I should think at the most a quarter of them would have read the book."

It had originally been Cushing's intention to play Van Helsing as described by Stoker, but Hammer had other ideas. "We had a meeting about that, 'cause it bothered me quite a bit. I said, 'Look, here's the description—a little old man who speaks double-Dutch. But at the time, I'd become pretty well known and popular, and they said, 'We think, from the point of view of commercialism, that you should play it as you are. It would be silly to put makeup and such all over you; there's no need.' So that's how it came about. I agreed with that, otherwise they could have got any actor who could have played it as it should have been. He's quite a little man in the story, isn't he? And really fussy!"

Concluded Next Issue . . .

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LEGACY OF HORROR

Continued from page 68

the real news as far as Universal fans are concerned is probably the inclusion of the never-before-on-DVD **HOUSE OF DRACULA**—the one item that was lacking in the Dracula/Frankenstein/Wolf Man sagas.

While not considered one of the highlights of the series (last films rarely are), **HOUSE OF DRACULA** is a film that benefits immeasurably from repeat viewings—and is clearly an improvement on its immediate predecessor, **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, if only by virtue of the fact that it actually integrates its monsters into one plot. Done on a pretty obviously tighter budget than any of the earlier films, **HOUSE OF DRACULA** nonetheless offers considerable atmosphere within its tight running time. Unlike **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, **HOUSE OF DRACULA** takes place almost entirely at night in a world of shadows and dark corners, which lends it an eerie otherworldly ambience quite lacking in not only **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, but in most of Universal's forties output.

The highlight of the film is Onslow Stevens' performance as Dr. Edelman. An always reliable—but underused—actor, Stevens is probably best known for his participation as one of the heroine's ill-fated suitors in **SECRET OF THE BLUE ROOM** (1933), or to Universal connoisseurs for his portrayal of playwright Lawrence Vail (a role originated on Broadway by the play's coauthor, George S. Kaufman) in **ONCE IN A LIFETIME** (1932). Here, however, he's afforded what amounts to the lead role (regardless of the billing). Stevens brings a freshness to the film that had long been lacking in the series. Dr. Edelman

is the sort of role—the benevolent scientist who becomes unhinged, in this case due to the blood of Dracula (John Carradine, replacing Lugosi in both this and **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**)—that would normally have gone to Karloff. By 1945, however, Karloff had played so many mad docs that he would likely have been on autopilot in the role—something one can glimpse in the actor's Dr. Niemann in **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**.

The source material and the transfer of **HOUSE OF DRACULA** is as close to pristine as we're ever likely to see. It's not the blinding revelation that **FRANKENSTEIN** was on its initial DVD incarnation, but then **HOUSE OF DRACULA** never looked as bad as **FRANKENSTEIN** had come to over the years. As it is, the new DVD is so sharp and with such good contrast that it looks every bit as good as... well, as the black-and-white scenes in **VAN HELSING**.

The question that arises is whether the inclusion of a 67-minute film is enough to tip the scales in favor of buying a set containing four movies fans may well already own. A slight push in that direction is the fact that there is less extraneous noise on the soundtrack of **SON OF DRACULA** than there was on its earlier release. Completists are sure to want it and probably the entire set, complete with busts. It's certainly the most convenient and handsome manner possible to have this assemblage of films, even if it has certain drawbacks and represents very little that is new.

And there's another reason to thank **VAN HELSING**—its DVD release in October will bring with it **THE INVISIBLE MAN LEGACY** and **THE MUMMY LEGACY**.

—Ken Hanke

SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 67

this survival genre goes, **THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX** (1965) is just about the summit, a gripping character study of a disparate group of male survivors who end up stranded in the middle of the Sahara Desert when their transport plane flies into a sandstorm and takes a dive. Surrounded by miles of sun-roasting sand, dependent on a dwindling water supply and a cargo of dates to nourish them, these men see little hope ahead. But there is a passenger among them with a rescue



solution so outrageous that it just might work: taking the remains of the wreckage and piecing them together to make a smaller operational plane.

Director Robert Aldrich, working with his **WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?** (1962) screenwriter Lukas Heller, adapted the highly engrossing, 1964 Elleston Trevor novel (Trevor is best known for writing the Quiller mystery series under the name Adam Hall) with much fidelity, allowing most of his terrific cast some potent confrontations and dramatic scenes of introspective torment. The major conflict develops between Frank Towns (James Stewart), a veteran pilot who feels responsible for the crash, and the no-nonsense Heinrich Dorfmann (Hardy Kruger), a socially disagreeable know-it-all, who becomes the men's best hope when he turns out to be an aircraft designer, albeit one with a secret. There's also a mentally unsettled oil rigger, Trucker Cobb (Ernest Borgnine), who is driven even nuttier by the oppressive desert atmosphere; a martinet captain (Peter Finch), who hasn't the slightest idea that his sergeant (Ronald Fraser) would like nothing better than to see him dead; and an alcoholic navigator (Richard Attenborough), who tries desperately to keep up morale, despite his own guilt about the crash. George Kennedy and Ian Bannen add some rugged manpower as a pair of oil drillers, the latter receiving a surprise Oscar nomination for his solid but far from distinctive work. Tampering a bit with the original Trevor characters, Dan Duryea shows up as a quivering accountant, the oldest of the survivors (although his literary counterpart was the youngest of the men), while future **CANDY**



(1968) director Christian Marquand portrays Cobb's French doctor, the equivalent character in the book being a Texas geologist. Aldrich's son, William, makes a nepotistic appearance, only to be disposed of before the opening credits are over, and there is a point-less appearance by Fred Astaire's TV dance partner Barrie Chase as a mirage, in a sequence that could have been chopped and reduced the 143-minute running time. (The DVD box incorrectly gives the running time as 149 minutes.)

This fine, letterbox edition of the film does not (alas) have commentary from surviving cast members, but instead offers three previews, including the Spanish (EL VUELO DEL FENIX) and the Portuguese (O VOO DO FENIX).

—Barry Monush

THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS

Image Entertainment—\$14.99

THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS (1959) may be the crown jewel of John Gilling's directing career. Active in British film since the mid-thirties, Gilling began writing early on, but only rarely directed his own screenplays. The story of Burke and Hare, who take up murder as an alternative to actual work, must have exerted some fascination, since he earlier treated it in a campy Tod Slaughter project, THE GREED OF WILLIAM HART (1948), where the names were altered on order from the censor. (They weren't allowed in the title of this version, either.)



While this later film is played more seriously, it's intermixed with a quirky, outrageous black humor that elevates it above the mostly serious horror product of the time. Donald Pleasance's Hare, who improbably fancies himself a dandy, casually picks his drunken partner's pocket, while George Rose's Burke kvetches on the gallows that payment was never tendered for delivering the last "subject" to the medical college. Some of the gags nearly slip in under the radar, as when Burke cas-

ually mentions that his ghastly harridan of a wife is off visiting her twin sister.

Pleasance and Rose (whose billing is criminally low) make the most of their plummy, lowlife characters. Peter Cushing soberly anchors their flights as the morally ambivalent Dr. Knox, whose need for anatomical subjects provides the duo with a market. Knox turns a blind eye (quite literally, thanks to his makeup) on their obviously homicidal activities. The wildly contrasting—even clashing—acting styles provide an effective shorthand for the characters' class differences, not that Cushing's performance lacks subtle comic touches, such as when he futilely tries to back the malodorous Burke away from his offended nostrils.

The supporting cast is uncommonly good, with Billie Whitelaw and John Cairney especially notable as a heart-breakingly mismatched and doomed pair of young lovers. Their abrupt and brutal deaths—shockingly unexpected in a fifties film—do much to keep Burke and Hare from being too goofily appealing, as does the appalling killing of Melvin Hayes' lovable Daft Jamie, which culminates, appropriately, in a pigpen.

Gilling's direction judges the differences in tone and effortlessly shifts from the comic to the horrific and back again, often on a dime. Such an accomplished balancing act is uncommon in horror films precisely because it's so difficult; possibly only James Whale and Stuart Gordon have managed it with equal finesse. On a more practical level, Gillings' varied camera angles transform what must have been a limited number of sets into a veritable maze of back streets, and his deployment of an unusually large contingent of extras is assured.

The DVD offers speckled but otherwise beautiful widescreen transfers of both the British and "continental" versions of the film. The latter features bared breasts and the murders are more violent, making the balance with the humor even more effective.

—Harry H. Long

THE THREE STOOGES IN HISTORY

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment—\$24.95

THE THREE STOOGES IN HISTORY adds five new titles to Columbia TriStar's already impressive library of Three Stooges shorts.

In SQUAREHEADS OF THE ROUND TABLE (1948), Moe, Larry, and Shemp are troubadours who team up with the local blacksmith, Cedric (Jock Mahoney), to win the woman he loves—Princess Elaine (Christine McIntyre)—and stop her marriage to the cruel Black Prince (Philip Van Zandt). I'M A MONKEY'S UNCLE (1948) has the threesome as cavemen who steal women away from rival cavemen, who then fight back for their beauties. The fun begins when Moe, Larry, and Shemp



bring out their arsenal of weapons (including a skunk), and let the other have it! RESTLESS KNIGHTS (1935) has Moe, Larry and Curly hired by the Royal Queen (Geneva Mitchell) as her bodyguards. Shortly thereafter, Prince Boris (George Baxter) makes off with the Queen and it's up to our heroes to save her and declare a regal victory. En garde, Prince Boris! MATRIPHONY (1942) features Moe, Larry, and Curly as Roman sculptors Moichus, Larrycus, and Curlycue, who have their work "cut out" for them in this short. The fair maiden, redheaded Diana (Marjorie Deanne) is trying to avoid a royal edict that all redheaded maidens be married. She seeks asylum in the sculptors' studio to avoid marrying Octopus Grabus (Vernon Dent), the ruler. To save Diana, Curly impersonates her and is wooed by the emperor. It's run, run, run—both from the Palace guards and the altar! Finally, FIDDLERS THREE (1948) offers Moe, Shemp, and Shempeth as royal fiddlers, who are vexed by an evil magician (Philip Van Zandt) when they try to save the ruler's daughter (Virginia Hunter) from abduction. Grimm's fairy tales will never be the same!

The DVD format is 1:33:1. The reproduction from film to DVD is remarkably clean. Liner notes are nonexistent and the only extras are subtitles in English, French, and Spanish.

—Dan Clayton

LIVING HELL

Subversive Cinema—\$24.95

Ever since RINGU (1998), Asian horror has been a hot commodity. Now comes IKI-JIGOKU (2000, aka LIVING HELL) from first-time director Shugo Fujii, which actually co-opts several American horror classics (for instance, 1974's THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE) and reinvents them.

The film opens with the violent murders of a couple and their dog. The sole survivor is an old woman, Chiyo (Yoshiko Shiraishi), who seems to be suffering from shock. Flash forward—Chiyo escapes from a hospital, only to appear with her mysterious and mute granddaughter, Yuki (Naoko Mori), at the home of wheelchair-bound Yasu (Hirohito Honda) and his parents. Opening their home to Chiyo and Yuki proves to be a big mistake, as the pair subjects

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Book Ends

The Scarlet Street Review of Books



TRUTH, JUSTICE, & THE AMERICAN WAY

Larry Thomas Ward

Nicholas Lawrence Books, 2003

158 pages—\$24.95

Small press publishers continue to offer large-titled books with Larry Thomas Ward's *Truth, Justice, & The American Way: The Life and Time of Noel Neill, The Original Lois Lane*. No Scarlet Streeter can say he didn't know what this biography was about when he bought it, and everyone who loves the Hollywood of the forties and fifties in general and television's ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN (1952-57) in particular should buy it.

Lois Lane—for those who are merely stranger visitors from another planet and unfamiliar with Earth's history—is the star reporter of *The Daily Planet* in Metropolis, where she competes with fellow newshound Clark Kent and pines for the Man of Steel, Superman, whose secret identity is, of course, Clark Kent. It's the classic love triangle, although it's

played by only two people and one of them is from Krypton.

No young woman could have been better prepared than Noel Neill to play the world's finest "girl reporter." Father David Neill was a newspaper man and mother LaVere Binger had briefly been a singer and dancer on New York's vaudeville stages. Marrying Neill and moving to Minneapolis forever left LaVere with the feeling that her career had been nipped in the bud, and the result was inevitable—like Mama Rose in *GYPSY*, LaVere pushed her daughter into show biz and gained vicarious pleasure through her little girl's triumphs. (Coincidentally, one of Noel's first film successes came in 1943's *LADY OF BURLESQUE*, based on the 1941 whodunit *The G-String Murders*, seemingly penned by Gypsy Rose Lee but actually ghostwritten by Craig Rice. The film landed Noel a Paramount contract.)

The most notable success of *Truth, Justice, & the American Way* is the way it serves to flesh out Noel Neill's career beyond the confines

of her performances as Lois Lane in the TV series and two earlier serials (1948's *SUPERMAN* and 1950's *ATOM MAN VS SUPERMAN*). We learn about her work as a band singer, her first radio appearances, her four appearances in the Henry Aldrich film series (her first was 1941's *HENRY ALDRICH FOR PRESIDENT*), her Westerns (including 1949's *ABILENE TRAIL*), and the "Teenagers" comedy series at Monogram. Still, for most fans the real thrill will be the Superman material, but you'll find no cattiness about Noel's rival Lois Lane, Phyllis Coates (who played the role in the TV series' first season) and no definitive answer (though lots of clues) as to whether Noel thinks her famous costar, George Reeves, committed suicide or was murdered in 1959.

Friend and costar Jack Larson (Jimmy Olsen on *ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN*) provides the affectionate introduction that

gets *Truth, Justice, & the American Way* off to a fine start, and all true fans will want to take the journey.

—Richard Valley

KRITZER TIME

Bruce Kimmel

1st Books Library, 2004

356 pages—\$19.95

All good things must come to an end, but at least with a trilogy it takes longer. Bruce Kimmel's autobiographical fiction *Kritzer Time* brings the curtain down on the adolescent adventures of Benjamin Kritzer, begun (appropriately) in *Benjamin Kritzer* (2002) and continued in *Kritzerland* (2003). Put these volumes all together and you've not only got one very big book, but you've got a vivid, moving evocation of a special time and place in our country's troubled history.

The time is the early sixties, when traces of the fifties still lingered in the wings and no one would ever have guessed that the decade would end with the Vietnam War, with protests, with love-ins and flower power, with gay rights and the women's movement, with X-rated films starring actual movie stars, and with a crook in the White House. Disaster sets the stage for this dark future, though, from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas—an event that Benjamin, try as he might, cannot view as anything other than remote—to a terrifying, tragic incident that hits harder and closer to home. Home, by the way, is Los Angeles and environs, a sprawling landscape undergoing nearly as many changes as the now-teenage Benjamin.

It is with *Kritzer Time* that Kimmel plots the rest of Benjamin's life. Those familiar with the author's own career prior to his authorship know that Benjamin's destiny lies in the arts, as an actor, songwriter, singer, producer, director. In *Kritzer Time*, we move beyond those tentative steps as an entertainer taken by Benjamin in the previous books; when the final pages are at hand, when it's time for his literary 11 o'clock showstopper, Benjamin has hit his stride and there's no turning back. Not for nothing is one of his favorite show tunes "Hey, Look Me Over!"

As in *Benjamin Kritzer* and *Kritzerland*, the cultural details—the sign-

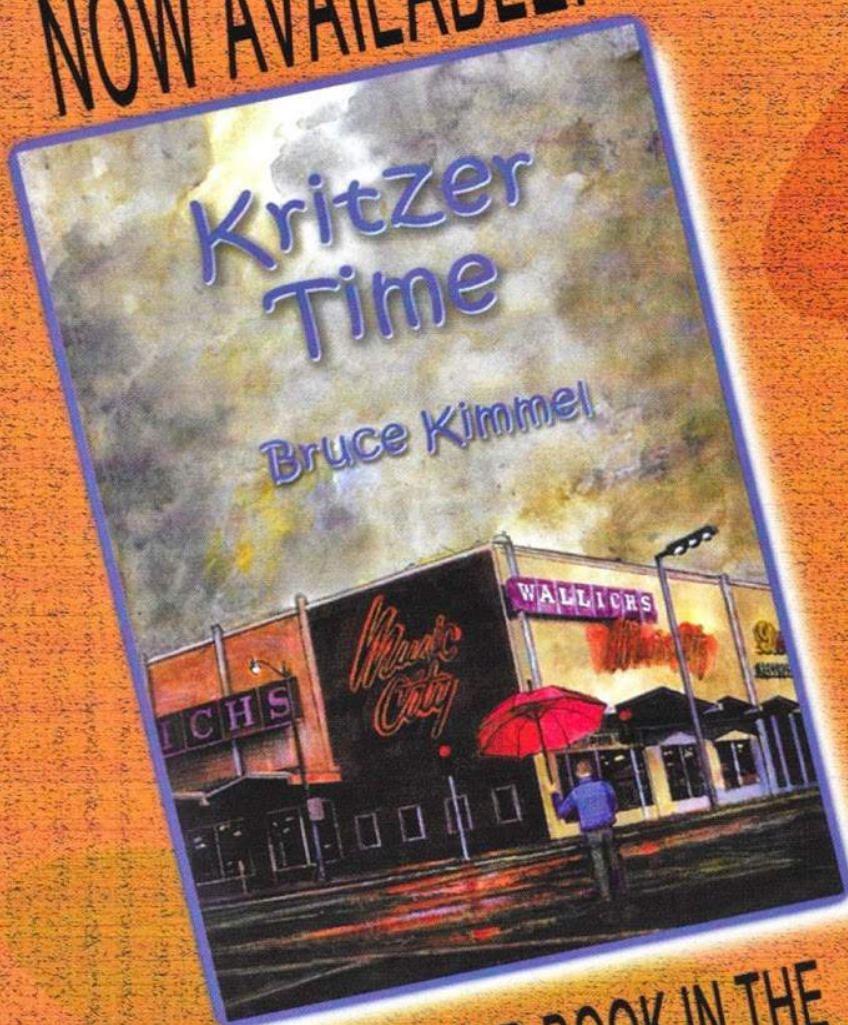
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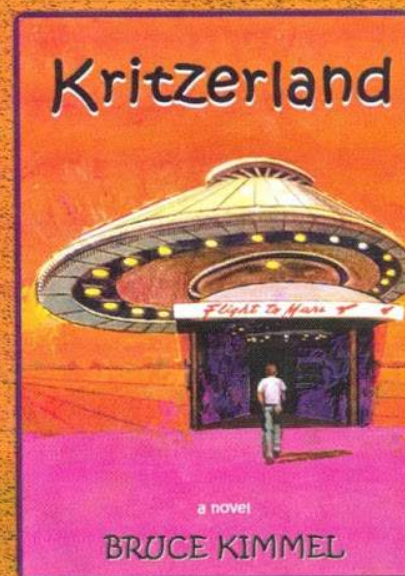
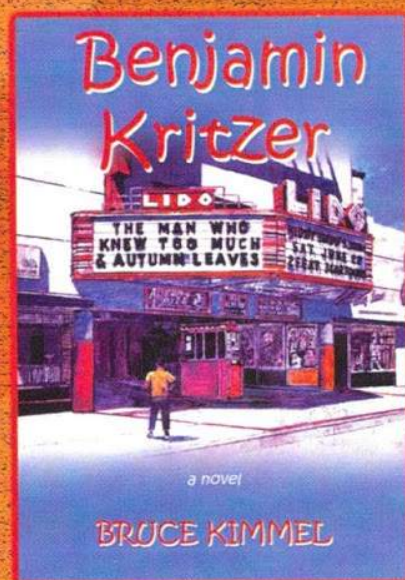
"Readers who are familiar with Bruce Kimmel's debut novel, *Benjamin Kritzer*, have discovered that Kimmel, relying on storytelling skill, wit and memory, has tapped into something quite wonderful with his portrait of a boy coming of age in late 1950s Los Angeles. What those unfamiliar with the author's shrewdly observed, wistful tales should know is that the outspoken and idiosyncratic Benjamin, putting the pangs of adolescence on hold by losing himself to the magic of the silver screen, deserves a place on the classics shelf alongside his spiritual brothers, the protagonists J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*."

—DICK LOCHTE, author of *Sleeping Dog*, *The Neon Smile*

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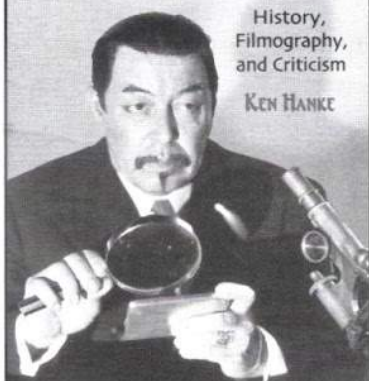
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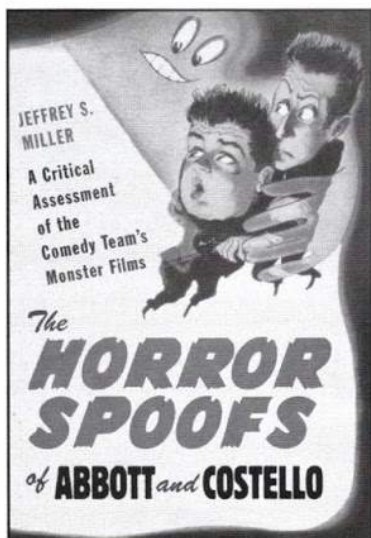
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BOOK ENDS

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posts up ahead—will bring a gentle smile or a nostalgic sigh to anyone who grew up in the same decade as Benjamin. The cultural colors with which Kimmel paints his novel include television's *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*, *MILION DOLLAR MOVIE*, and *MAVERICK*; the songs "Wooly Booly," "Pocketful of Miracles," "Firefly," "Days of Wine and Roses," and "Moon River;" the films *SCENT OF MYSTERY* (1960, in Smell-o-Vision and starring Peter Lorre), *WEST SIDE STORY* (1961), *THE PARENT TRAP* (1961), *GYPSY* (1962), *THE MUSIC MAN* (1962), and *BIRDMAN OF ALCATRAZ* (1962); telephone prefix letters, Columbia House Stereophonic Record Players, summer camp, summer stock, Freddie Blassie, Phil Silvers, Judy Garland, Haystack Calhoun, Dave Brubeck, Gorgeous George, and Hayley Mills.

Kritzer Time is, in a way, twilight time—the end of an era and the end of a funny, heartwarming, endearing series of books. Still, as Benjamin, not without a trace of sadness, learns, life goes on. Let's hope that it goes on to include further novels from the talented Mr. Kimmel.

—Richard Valley

WALKING THE SHARK

Anne Sharp

Xlibris Corporation, 2003

50 pages—\$19.99

Anne Sharp's *Walking the Shark: A Peter Lorre Book* is a tribute to the versatile actor once dubbed (by Forrest J Ackerman) the Lord High Minister of All that is Sinister.

The slim book (whose title was inspired by Lorre's main activity in the 1961 sci-fi thriller *VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA*) is obviously the work of a star-struck fan, not a biographer, but it's intelligently put together and benefits from 21 nicely reproduced photographs, many of them rendered full-page. The text includes a brief biography, an examination of several signature Lorre performances, and a "resume" that lists the actor's stage, screen, radio, and television appearances. (The radio and TV listings are incomplete, but offer a fair overview.) Among the quotes from such figures as Pauline Kael, J. D. Salinger, and Graham Greene in a "testimonials" section of the book is one from Lorre himself, which is worth repeating:

"I came to Berlin with 10 borrowed marks in my pocket, and I went to the theater. The manager told me to come in, because he said I didn't look like an actor. He sent me over to see Brecht. We talked for about half an hour and it was as if we had known each other for 20 years. 'You're not going to get that part,' he told me. I felt terrible. It was very Brechtian, really, because he waited a moment and then said: 'you're going to play the lead in another play I have.' Deep down in my heart, you see, I'm a Cinderella."

—Drew Sullivan

SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 71

Yasu to tortures both physical and mental. There are no witnesses to these acts of brutality, and no one believes the boy's claims that Chiyo and Yuki could be capable of such violence.

Horror fans will find reference not only to *CHAINSAW*, but to such genre gems as *PSYCHO* (1960), *WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE* (1962), and *SISTERS* (1973).

At times, *LIVING HELL* hints at the supernatural, which doesn't mesh with the "true crime" aspects of the story—though these elements can perhaps be attributed to the insanity of one (or more) of the characters, the audience seeing things through their eyes.

Cheers to Subversive Cinema for making life a *LIVING HELL* for horror fans.

—Kevin G. Shinnick

PROPHECY

Paramount Home Video—\$14.99

The year 1979 proved to be an important one in the history of modern horror. Such original fare as *PHANTASM*, *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, and *ALIEN* were released to the accolades of horror fans around the world. But there's one film from that same golden year that seems to have been lost in the shuffle, a film that deserves a second look—John Frankenheimer's *PROPHECY*.

Robert Foxworth portrays Robert Verne, an inner-city doctor who rapidly becomes disgusted with the conditions in which he works. Approached by a friend with a sidetrack job offer, Verne and his wife (Talia Shire) take to the woods of Maine as representatives of the EPA. Their new work centers on analyzing the environment in a heated dispute between a prosperous paper mill and a tribe of Indians who maintain the land is theirs. What's discovered, however, is that lethal concentrations of methylmercury have been introduced into the water, causing freakish mutations in both the animals and the Indian people. One of these mutations, a bear hideously transformed into something even Lovecraft would have admired, stalks the woods in search of prey.

One of the things that makes *PROPHECY* so nostalgic and unique is its commentary on social and environmental concerns within the framework of a horror film, much like the atomic sci-fi films of the fifties and sixties. The same year that spawned Frankenheimer's film also saw the release of *THE CHINA SYNDROME*, so the images of the evils that happen when man goes too far against nature were already embedded in the consciousness of a new generation. The film also fearlessly addresses the many racial tensions that existed between Native Americans and

Walking The Shark A Peter Lorre Book

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white people. While many of the horror films in the following three years would concern themselves with slashers chasing victims, PROPHECY continues to stand as a unique achievement in the genre due to its presentation—telling a good horror story and addressing environmental concerns without resorting to pulpit thumping or caricatures.

Paramount presents the film widescreen in a 2.35:1 aspect ratio. Sadly, the disc is totally devoid of any extras (not even a single trailer). Any deleted footage or behind-the-scenes documentary would have been a welcome addition here. Nonetheless, the print itself looks crisp and sharp and the color saturation tones in the marvelous cinematography make the picture breathtaking.

—Brooke Perry

SCREAMING DEAD

El Independent Cinema—\$19.99

El's Seduction Cinema, home of the T&A spoof, offers a major change in policy with SCREAMING DEAD (2003), the first of a planned series of six horror films. If SCREAMING DEAD is any indication, the series (released under a revamped subsidiary, Shock-O-Rama) will be a welcome one for horror fans. The story and performances are equal to many horror films on the market today.

Cult director Brett Piper (2003's ARACHNIA), one of the few directors who truly can do it all—screenplay, direction, special effects, editing, and probably coffee making—has fashioned a haunted house film that is superior to

such Hollywood misfires as the recent remake of THE HAUNTING (1999).

The story has sleazy photographer Roger Kneale (Joseph Farrell) renting a haunted house for his latest project. He brings with him several models (played by Misty Mundae, C. J. DiMarsico, and Heidi Kristoffer), willing to endure any degradation to be famous. Along for the thrill ride is Kneale's lovely, protective assistant, Maura Holloway (Rachel Robbins). Sam Rogan (Rob Monkiewicz), representing the house owners, throws a monkey wrench into Kneale's monkey business by trying to protect the young ladies. Rogan also sets his sights on Maura.

The sadistic photog soon discovers to his horror that there's an even greater evil lurking within the walls of the house—the undead Rossiter! (*Scarlet Street*'s Kevin G. Shinnick plays the role in makeup created by Michael Thomas to resemble the painting in 1945's THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY). The finale harkens back to the Vincent Price/Roger Corman Poe films of the sixties.

Included on the DVD is a "making of" featurette, a documentary about the abandoned asylum in Marlboro, New Jersey (where most of the movie was shot), a Misty Mundae retrospective, and trailers for upcoming titles.

—August Tibbitt

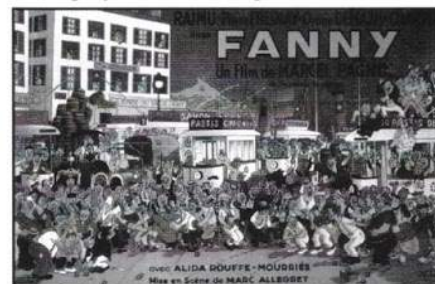
THE FANNY TRILOGY

Kino on Video—\$79.95

Before Joshua Logan's FANNY (1961—and no, it really wasn't advertised that

way), there was Marcel Pagnol and his trilogy—MARIUS (1931, codirected by Alexander Korda), FANNY (1932, directed by Marc Allégret), and CÉSAR (1936, directed by Pagnol).

The first filmmaker ever elected to the Académie France, Pagnol initially achieved fame as a playwright, first with MERCHANTS OF GLORY (1925) and TOPAZE (1928), and then with MARIUS (1929) and FANNY (1931). By the time he had committed the second play to celluloid, his focus had sufficiently shifted to the point that the third play, CÉSAR, began life as a mo-



tion picture and only made it to the stage in 1946. (Nevertheless, Pagnol considered movies worthwhile primarily for the filming of stage works.)

The Fanny Trilogy, set in Pagnol's beloved Marseilles and also filmed there (so that the pictures become a historical document as well as drama), tells the story of handsome young Marius (Pierre Fresnay), who loves Fanny (Orane Demazis) but loves the sea more passionately. Not that his love for Fanny is

without ardor—after Marius sails away, the girl finds herself pregnant. Fanny marries the considerably older Honoré Panisse (Fernand Charpin), who loves her and wants to raise the child as his own. Lording it over all is Marius' father, César (Raimu), whose gruff exterior hides great wisdom and a tender heart.

So popular was Pagnol's trilogy that Hollywood produced its own version in 1938—*PORT OF SEVEN SEAS*, which brought together the unique talents of screenwriter (and soon to be director) Preston Sturges and director (and soon to be unemployed) James Whale. (Oddly, Sturges—creator of such sexually suggestive character names as Trudy Kockenlocker—dropped the name Fanny in favor of Madelon.)

Kino on Video has done the Trilogy proud, and all three films look splendid for their advanced age. Extras include the documentary *ABOUT THE TRILOGY* (2003), theatrical trailers for all three films, audio commentaries (not the entire length of the films) by Pagnol, posters and stills galleries, and an essay by Bertrand Tavernier.

—Drew Sullivan

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

First Run Features—\$19.99

Back in 1971, Paramount released the cult horror film *LET'S SCARE JESSICA TO DEATH*, directed by John Hancock. Hancock went on to direct *BANG THE DRUM SLOWLY* (1973), *WEEDS* (1985), and the popular family drama, *PRANCER* (1989). He became a busy TV director (including helming several episodes of the 1985 *TWILIGHT ZONE* series), but he has been away from thrillers for far too long. *SUSPENDED ANIMATION* (2003) marks Hancock's welcome return to the genre.

Cowritten with Hancock's wife, actress/writer Dorothy Tristan, *SUSPENDED ANIMATION* is a study of a dangerous obsession with evil. Animator/director Tom Kempton (Alex McArthur) goes on a snowmobiling weekend with two friends, Sandor Hansen and Cliff Modjeska (Fred Meyers and Jeff Puckett). When his vehicle gets stuck, he stops at a cabin to get some help. Bad move! The house is owned by two of the craziest sisters since *ARSENIC AND OLD LACE* (1944)—Ann (Sage Allen) and Vanessa (Laura Esterman) Boulette. The siblings hope to add Tom to their collection of victims.

Ann and Vanessa subject Tom to mental and physical torture (they must have seen *LIVING HELL*) before he's rescued in the nick of time. With most fright films, this would have been the entire story. With *SUSPENDED ANIMATION*, it's just the beginning!

The movie stands out from so many modern-day thrillers—not least because the cast doesn't consist of mindless, sex-crazed teens, but working adults in their thirties and forties. *SUSPENDED* was shot over a 48-day period in Indiana,

California, and Canada, on high definition video and with a \$2 million budget. Gore effects are kept to a minimum, though the suspense quota never suffers. The effective score was composed by Angelo (TWIN PEAKS) Badalamenti.

SUSPENDED ANIMATION had a brief theatrical release during the 2003 Halloween season. Hopefully, a wider audience will discover this film in its DVD incarnation. Hancock has been quoted as saying that he has several other film projects in the work, including another horror film. Let's hope it isn't another 30-year wait!

—David Guffy

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

Miramax Entertainment—\$29.99

In 2000, *A HARD DAY'S NIGHT* (1964), Richard Lester's landmark film starring the Beatles, returned to the big screen in all its glory, with a restored picture and beautifully remixed soundtrack. As fresh and inventive today as it had been in the sixties, it had become something more: a document of an era. The irony is that *A HARD DAY'S NIGHT* is often incorrectly described as a documentary, which is the one thing it never was and was never intended to be, what with its carefully crafted screenplay by Alun Owen. Yet time has made it the ulti-



mate documentary on the myth that was the Beatles and the phenomenon that was Beatlemania (the film's actual shooting title).

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT's plot can be summed up in one sentence—the Beatles go to the south of England to appear on a TV special—but within that deceptively simple plot director Lester and the four lads from Liverpool created something unique. The film not only defined and refined the public image of the Beatles, it established the basic style of much sixties filmmaking and made the moviegoing world completely rethink the term, "a British picture." With few exceptions at the time, a British pedigree on a film was box-office poison. After *A HARD DAY'S NIGHT*, it

actually became desirable. The British Invasion in film—like the British Invasion in music that parallels it—succeeded in capturing the social and aesthetic imagination of a generation, not in the least because it was such a breath of cheeky fresh air.

As conceived, the film was nothing more than a vehicle to exploit the popularity of the Beatles as quickly and as cheaply as possible. No one, not even the Beatles (Ringo Starr wanted to make enough money to open a beauty parlor!), had any idea that they were anything but a Nine Day Wonder perched on the edge of the eighth day—but *A HARD DAY'S NIGHT* hit a nerve with young viewers. It offered an accessible identification in a way that earlier youth films never had—a sense of humor in the face of helplessness and the feeling that beliefs, personality, and individuality can only be killed by authority if so allowed. Authority reduced to absurdity was less threatening and more comprehensible.

A few of the gags may not play today (not many modern viewers are apt to realize that the shirts George Harrison dismisses as "grotty" are Dave Clark Five apparel), but the attitude, mood, and sheer joyfulness of youth and film are undiminished.

—Ken Hanke

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Walt Disney Home Video—\$29.99

Disney has concocted another splendid Masterpiece Edition with their recent two-disc release of the 1950 animated *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*.

A major bonus highlight is Disney's famous network television debut, *ONE HOUR IN WONDERLAND*, a Christmas special that presented the TV premieres of excerpts from the animated shorts and features, as well as a plug for *ALICE*. Of special interest is a clip from the rare and still controversial *SONG OF THE SOUTH* (1946). Here the live-animated "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" is followed by one of the charming all-animated sequences, both restored to pristine color for DVD. The fascinating, live black-and-white episodes feature a jaunty early fifties Walt, already adept at charming audiences via the new medium, Kathryn Beaumont, the voice of Alice, and a poignant appearance by the talented and ill-fated Bobby Driscoll.

Another quintessential fifties moment is a clip from *THE FRED WARING SHOW*, in which Fred and his Pennsylvanians present a half-hour extravaganza based on the *ALICE* score, a real time trip back to the dear dead days of live TV. Beaumont again appears, along with Sterling Holloway.

Documentary footage traces the transition of Alice's original opening number into the Main Title for *PETER PAN*, and there is a jukebox of other deleted numbers. The galleries of de-



velopmental art are especially interesting. Though original artists are not credited, connoisseurs of Mary Blair will recognize how much her distinctive designs—if not her actual style—influenced the final film.

WONDERLAND is one of Disney most gorgeously designed films, and this transfer does full justice to its innovative style. The use of lighting effects and chiaroscuro are particularly vividly realized, especially in sequences such as the Cheshire Cat scenes, in which the rotund feline literally glows with rounded air-brushed effects against a background of grays and cobalt blues. This transfer even restores the pink highlights to the gray Sea of Tears, an effect that was somehow altered in the original DVD release.

Add Disney's first nods to Lewis Carroll, the silent comedy, ALICE'S WONDERLAND (1923), and the thirties short, THRU THE MIRROR (1936), which sends Mickey Mouse through the looking glass, and you have one of the most fascinating and entertaining DVD collections yet released.

—Ross Care

SOMETHING TO SCREAM ABOUT Tempe—\$19.95

Director Jason Paul Cullum simply loves scream queens. Not only has he written the book *Assault of the Killer B's: Interviews with 20 Cult Film Actresses* (McFarland & Company, 2004), he's also compiled this informative series of video interviews, titled SOMETHING TO SCREAM ABOUT (2004).

Though reference is made to Fay Wray, the earliest scream queen interviewed is NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968) star Judith O'Dea. The rest of the women interviewed hail from the eighties, nineties, and the present day. They all have interesting stories to tell about how they broke into the business, reminiscing about their auditions, first breaks, self image, nudity, plastic surgery, and fans. The interviewees—including Brinke Stevens, Debra DeLiso, Debbie Rochon, Denise Duff, Brandi Burkett, Felissa Rose, Lilith Stabs, and Julie Strain—acquit themselves nicely.

Extras include the five-minute featurette INTRODUCING LIZZY STRAIN, which looks like it was filmed at a horror con, a 1986 Debbie Rochon stu-

dent film (also running five minutes), and a short film by Cullum called JULIA WEPT—which has its own set of extras!

—Kevin G. Shinnick

THE MONSTER CLUB

Pathfinder Home Entertainment—\$14.98

After Hammer Films' rival, Amicus Productions, dissolved, producer Milton Subotsky decided to continue making omnibus horror films through a new company—Sword and Sorcery Productions. The result was THE MONSTER CLUB (1980).

Real-life horror author R. Chetwynd-Hayes (whose short stories inspired 1973's FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE as well as THE MONSTER CLUB) is played by John Carradine. He's bitten by the vampire Erasmus (Vincent Price) and taken to the Monster Club, where the partygoers are all monsters. (Actually, they're mostly poor dancers in subpar makeup and slipshod, slip-on monster masks.) Price and Carradine have some choice lines, but it cannot distract from the poor idea of the club and its uninspired production design.

That's the framing story. Much better are the three main tales of interspecies (human and monster) horror, which are all very well executed. The first concerns a whistling creature called a Shad-mock (James Laurenson), the offspring of a vampire and werewolf. It's a sad little story of loneliness, starring James Laurenson, Barbara Kellerman, and Hammer hunk Simon Ward. The second is a humorous tale of vampirism, with Britt Ekland as the mother of young Lintom Busotsky (Warren Saire), another hybrid—this time a mortal and a vampire. Donald Pleasence is featured as Pickering, a vampire hunter. The third and most effective story has Sam (Stuart Whitman), a film director, scouting a likely location for a fright film. He finds one, populated by ghouls. Sam is saved by a Humgoo (human/ghoul progeny) named Luna (Lesley Dunlop), and they seek sanctuary in the local church while the hungry ghouls, led by Luna's innkeeper father (Patrick Magee), attack. The story shares some plot elements with HORROR HOTEL (1960), Subotsky's first horror production.

Directed by Roy Ward Baker (1970's VAMPIRE LOVERS), THE MONSTER CLUB is no lost classic, but it's a lot of fun. The DVD audio and sound is good. There's a separate musical track, a trailer, bios, and production notes. One caveat, and unfortunately it's a major one—the smug, annoying audio commentary by Luke Y. Thompson and Gregory Weinkauff. Buy the disc, enjoy the film, but skip the commentary.

—Kevin G. Shinnick

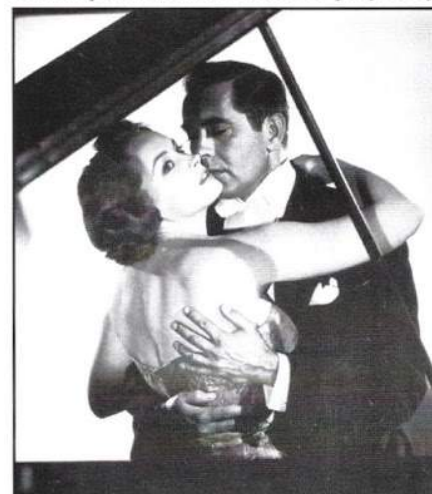
THE EDDY DUCHIN STORY

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment—\$24.95

I first became aware of this biographical film via The Three Stooges. In a

tense moment in the Stooges' SPACE SHIP SAPPY (1957), Joe Besser, fearing that their rocket ship might crash at any moment, shouts "I can't die! I haven't seen THE EDDY DUCHIN STORY yet!" Well, any movie that rates a joke like that must have been popular in its day, and THE EDDY DUCHIN STORY was in fact one of the highest-grossing films of 1956. Certainly there's very little to distinguish EDDY DUCHIN from dozens of other biopics of various entertainers, well-known and obscure, but perhaps that's exactly why moviegoers felt comfortable sitting through this two-hour plus mixture of lush music and tearjerkers.

Proficiently directed by George Sidney, the film traces the career of the charismatic pianist/band leader as played by



Tyrone Power, starting with his arrival in New York City in the late 1920s and ending with his untimely death from leukemia, at the age of 40. Power isn't particularly convincing playing a teenager at the movie's start (he was 43 at the time), but he makes up for it in enthusiasm and does a good job of faking Duchin's trademark crossover keyboard moves. (Carmen Cavallaro supplies the off-screen piano playing).

The first half of the film is devoted to Duchin's rise from relief pianist at New York's Central Park Casino to member of Lou Reisman's orchestra to his own stardom as the star attraction at the Casino and on national radio. (Reisman is played by Larry Keating, known to sci-fi fans for 1951's WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE. Play in his band, but do not trust this man to let you on his space ship.) Duchin falls in love with and marries socialite/fashion designer Marjorie Oelrichs (Kim Novak, wearing less makeup than usual), only to see her die most glamorously after giving birth to their son. The second half of the film involves Duchin's attempts to build a relationship with his estranged offspring, Peter (played by Mickey Maga, as a five-year-old; Rex Thompson, as a

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KAY LINAKER

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SS: Peter Lorre was an extremely talented actor capable of such performances as the ones he gave in *M* and *MAD LOVE*. Did he dislike playing Mr. Moto?

KP: Well, I think he'd only done one Moto at that point, but after he'd done a few he *hated* it! Peter did quite a lot of good television on the East Coast before he died. He was delightful!

SS: In 1938 you had a strong supporting role in *THE LAST WARNING*, the third and last of the Bill Crane Crime Club films.

KP: That was a fun film. Everybody was delightful to work with and we all went to lunch together. Nobody was star-struck; nobody was anything but professional. In those days, everybody was businesslike and, if your call was for eight o'clock in the morning, you were there. The film was shot at a house that the director, Al Rogell, used to own. It was a lovely place with a swimming pool. It was not in a film area. It was in the Los Feliz area, which was strictly Los Angeles property owners. It was a delightful place and Al was a very competent director.

SS: *THE LAST WARNING* is the only one of the series that he directed and it's considerably more stylish than the others.

KP: Well, he was an excellent director. Everybody on that film—Preston Foster and Frank Jenks, Joyce Compton, E. E. Clive, Albert Dekker—was totally professional. Actually, Albert Dekker had just changed his name from Albert von Dekker. He had come out to Hollywood after playing the John Barrymore role in *GRAND HOTEL* on the stage in New York. So we had a fun cast.

SS: Were any of the film's interiors shot at Rogell's house?

KP: No, only the exteriors. We shot the exteriors all at one time and then we moved into the studio.

SS: Your filmography lists Rouben Mamoulian's *BLOOD AND SAND*.

KP: He was a lovely man. *BLOOD AND SAND* was such an amazing film, because everybody in it was doing a very good job. Rita Hayworth had a very hard time because she was a dancer and she'd had her hairline changed with electrolysis. She was a pleasant gal, but at that point in her career she was a

dancer and didn't know anything about reading lines. In the dinner party scene, she was supposed to lean forward and in a sexy way say to Ty Power, "It must be very exciting to fight bulls." That was her first really important line and she leaned forward and said it with no inflection at all! So we did another take and she said, "It must be very exciting to fight bulls." And that wasn't right. Mamoulian did—well, I don't know *how* many takes, but for four days we were at the

dinner table and she was becoming an actress. It was very interesting. Finally, Mamoulian set up the camera and she did readings in closeup—"It must be very exciting to fight bulls," "It must be very exciting to fight bulls." Finally she leaned forward and said, "It must be very exciting to fight bulls," and everybody heaved a big sigh of relief. Mamoulian said, "Print it!" She was such a nice person and she was acting—really acting—for the first time.

SS: You're in a party scene in the film noir classic, *LAURA*. You don't have any dialogue, though.

KP: No. No, I don't. There was a lot of trouble on that picture. It was started by Rouben Mamoulian, then it was changed. The only thing that was consistent was the man who played the villain—Clifton Webb. Gene Tierney was in it throughout, too. The part that I originally had was shot during the first week. Then they changed everything and I ended up in one party scene with no lines! Things like that happened consistently, because they went off half-cocked and had to start all over again. It was particularly difficult with directors. One director would start and then, for one reason or another, he'd be replaced. That's what happened to James Whale on *THEY DARE NOT LOVE*, and then to Rouben Mamoulian on *LAURA*. He was replaced by Otto Preminger. The fact is that Mr. Preminger was a very unpleasant man. He was very difficult to work with and, I guess, unsure of himself. Insulting people was probably just a cover-up for his own feelings of inadequacy.

SS: Did Preminger direct you in the party scene or was it Mamoulian?

KP: It was Mamoulian.

SS: Who would you say was responsible for the success of *LAURA*, though—Mamoulian or Preminger?

KP: As far as I'm concerned, it would be Otto Preminger, the big fat man. It was not the gracious, charming director, Rouben Mamoulian. It was not the smooth gent; it was the buffy guy.

SS: In the early forties, just before you went into the Red Cross, you were offered a part in a play with Bela Lugosi.

KP: Yes, *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*. (Laughs) I talked to Lugosi and the director and producer, and they were very

nice and wanted me to do the part. I didn't want to do it. I had a feeling it would be extremely difficult to work with Mr. Lugosi. I thought he'd lost it! You looked in his eyes and there was something really dead there. The body was still functioning—he knew his left from his right and that kind of thing—but he was just really gone. I didn't want to get embroiled with Lugosi.

SS: Well, he was still working, though. He'd been touring in *DRACULA*.

KP: Yes, but he was very familiar with that play, and a company will cover for you if you make any mistakes. *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* was a break-away thing that he was planning to do, an effort to change his image. I had a hard time seeing him playing the lead in that!

SS: What brought about your switch from an acting to a writing career, and from Kay Linaker to Kate Phillips?

KP: I'd known a lot of writers in California. I learned my trade from people like the Epstein Brothers, who wrote *CASABLANCA*. And when I was working with John Ford I got to know his writers. I did one job of writing while I was still acting; I worked at Walt Disney. I also wrote a radio show for *VOICE OF AMERICA*. When I met my husband, I was working with the Red Cross and he was in the Air Force. He was a singer and he didn't want to go back to singing. He'd begun writing and had very good luck selling material to top magazines. I became a writer with him. My husband and I had a 40-year career of writing together. People used to ask us how long we'd been married and we'd say 180 years! (Laughs) Well, how much time do married couples actually spend together? You get up in the morning and have breakfast together, then he goes to work. Now she goes to work, too! You don't see him again until supper time. After supper, you have a few minutes, but then you gotta get to bed because you have to get up in the morning. The average married couple ends up with about five hours together a day. We got up, had breakfast, and worked until one o'clock. We stopped for an hour for lunch and then we worked until six o'clock—and if we were on deadline, we worked after supper. We were together at least 12 hours a day, so that's why we were married so long!

SS: Among horror and science fiction fans, your most famous writing credit is for *THE BLOB*. It's one of the earliest example of the teen horror film.

KP: Well, I believe that teenagers in every generation get the short end of the stick. People have said for years that teenagers are going to the dogs! They attribute all kinds of nastiness to them and I don't think that's true. We all come into the world with good in us. When you keep putting these bad labels on people instead of looking for the good in them, you're creating a bad generation. *THE BLOB*'s hero was named Steve before Steve McQueen got the job. In the story, Steve comes from an uncertain family. His mother died

young and his father was busy doing other things, and maybe his father was a heavy drinker. This is a young man who has a bad reputation and doesn't deserve it.

SS: And because of his reputation, he has a hard time convincing anyone he's seen a monster from outer space.

KP: The concept of *THE BLOB* is that, if you believe something and can get one person to believe it with you, and that person can get somebody to believe it with him, you finally have a positive source going. Now, the positive source won't be able to wipe out evil, but the positive source will be able to control it. That's the theme of *THE BLOB*.

SS: The cast of *THE BLOB* is mostly made up of locals from Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where the film was shot.

KP: There were three professional actors—Steve McQueen, Aneta Corsaut, and Olin Howlin. The rest weren't professionals. In the sequence where the kids knock on doors and try to get the townspeople to join in fighting this thing, one young man was my husband's second cousin! (Laughs) I'd known him from the time he was 12 years old. I had just been married. We were at his grandfather's 75th birthday party and I felt terribly out of place. I walked into one of the rooms at this country club, and there sat a beautiful, beautiful young man. He looked so unhappy. I said, "You look as miserable as I feel! May I join you?" He said, "Oh, yes!" I sat down and Phillip and I just fell in love with one another. Whenever Phillip was having trouble with his stepfather, he'd give us a call and spend the weekend with us.

SS: Did he become interested in show business because of you?

KP: No. In order to please him, Phillip went to his stepfather's alma mater, Amherst, and in his second year he was in a play. The theater bug bit him and he told me he was going to be an actor. His stepfather—Sam Epstein, who researched what came to be known as Epstein-Barr Syndrome—Sam was having a cat fit; Phillip had a terrible fight with him. Well, they were getting ready to shoot *THE BLOB*, and I figured the experience would either kill him or cure him. So Phillip did *THE BLOB*, and then he went to Columbia and got his masters in international banking. He went to England, married a former lady in waiting to Queen Elizabeth, and just a few years ago got his PhD in pure mathematics—the kind that doesn't have any numbers. I made him promise that he would never try to explain it to me. (Laughs)

SS: *THE BLOB*'s director, Irwin S. Yeaworth, primarily made religious films.

KP: Yeaworth didn't know what the hell he was doing! Phillip told me that Steve McQueen kept making suggestions to Yeaworth—"Maybe we ought to try it this way instead"—and that's the way they filmed it.

SS: Still, the amateurs give natural performances, including the little boy.

KP: Isn't he wonderful? They were all little theater people. When somebody is really interested in playing the character, in being the character, then you get a relaxed and realistic performance. That's true whether you've been doing it for 100 years or whether it's your first time. I was told very early that, when you come into the theater, the last time you're yourself is when you say hello to the stage doorman. From that point on, you're the character. You know everything about the character. You know whether she drinks tea or coffee for breakfast, whether she's superstitious—it's all there in the script if you just read it carefully between the lines.

SS: Isn't it difficult to get into character for a television show or movie? There's usually a long wait between scenes.

KP: Well, it's even worse than that! You have to come back four days or a week later and pick up where you left off. That's why the script girl is such a gifted person. She knows exactly how far down your cigarette has been smoked, she knows whether your hand was on your cheek or your chest—she has that all down in notes. The technical side of film is, I think, absolutely fascinating!

SS: Were you happy with the final result on *THE BLOB*?

KP: Yes, I think it turned out extremely well; I'm not at all ashamed of it. It's absolutely remarkable that it was done at all! One thing that I'm very pleased about is that they did the one thing I felt was necessary and that I was very careful to write in—and that is they didn't show a person covered in this goo. Naturally, that's exactly what they showed in the remake! (Laughs) I love the scene where it comes through the projection-room window in the movie theater. Unfortunately, they used some very bad footage of people running out of the theater. It was too big a theater for a small town and there were too many people. That wasn't the way it was written. It was supposed to be a theater in a small town, a theater that holds at most a couple of hundred people. There were dozens of those theaters all over the country at that time. When I saw that scene, I said, "Oh, no!" Overall, it was good, though. I saw *THE BLOB* for the first time when it was showing in Hollywood. Gordon Chase's wife was with me, and she said, "You know, Kate, that's a very good job!" I felt good about that. I didn't see the film again until I was teaching a course in screenwriting for Continuing Education. The film department needed to make some money so we could rent films, and it was decided that maybe people would pay a dollar if we showed one of my films. First we showed *GIRL FROM MANDALAY*, and then we showed *THE BLOB*. That was the first time I really looked at it seriously, and I wasn't ashamed of it.

SS: When you began writing, did you give up acting entirely?

KP: I didn't act again till about six years ago. I played the lead in a two-character play in Canada at the Thousand Islands Playhouse. When I called Equity to reinstate my membership, the lady said, "When did you join Equity?" I said, "I joined in 1934," and she thought I was a nut! (Laughs) I said, "It would be better if you called the producer and got his input on this." About half an hour later, he called me and he was still laughing! He said, "That woman was sure that you were putting her on. She was sure that you were some kind of a nut!" And I said, "Maybe I am, but more to the point, maybe you are for hiring somebody my age!"

SS: Was it hard for you to get back into the swing of things?

KP: Not at all! No matter what we do, we're all giving a performance. When I went into Red Cross in the forties, that was the end of my association with the motion picture industry. The only time I had anything to do with it was when my husband and I were doing *THE ALAN LADD SHOW*. I went over to the studio to have lunch with my agent, Earl Kramer, who was Stanley Kramer's uncle—well, he was the only father that Stan ever knew. Stan and I grew up together. Earl was my agent and Stan wasn't allowed to come into the industry until he finished at UCLA. While Earl and I were sitting in the commissary, Stan came by and put his arms around me and hugged me and was delighted to see me. All of a sudden he said, "Katie, I need you. I need you very badly. I'm doing a picture and I need you." I said, "Look, I'm married, I have two children, and I'm busy doing a series. I don't have time." He said, "I promise you, I will only take three days. I'll do your scenes in three days." He kept insisting and finally I said, "Look, when I went into Red Cross, I took honorable withdrawal from Equity, but I didn't do anything about the Screen Actors' Guild and I'd owe thousands of dollars in dues." And Stan said, "Well, let me check it out." So he checked it out and he came back laughing. I said, "What's so funny?" He said, "You're one of the first 100 members of the Screen Actors' Guild, so you never have to pay any dues!" (Laughs) You see, when I went to California, I was a member of Equity. Ralph Morgan and Boris Karloff and other people were trying to get members into the Screen Actors' Guild—the studios did not want the Guild—and they arranged it so that everybody who was a member of Equity had to join the Guild. And that's how I came to be one of the founding members of SAG!

SS: But you still didn't do the part?

KP: For Stan? No. I just absolutely couldn't. It was the part that Marlene Dietrich played in his *JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG*. He said he wanted a beautiful brunette, but he settled for a beautiful blonde! (Laughs)

SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 15

coverage of these grand dames of dread and the stories behind their career highs and lows made great reading—so great that I got online to order the double feature DVD of *WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HELEN?* and *WHO EVER SLEW AUNTIE ROO?*, two films I had only seen years ago on network TV and am now anxious to reexamine and savor. Richard Valley's tie-in interview with Debbie Reynolds and the *FRANKLY SCARLET* backstory on how he got the interview were a treat. As "the one that got away," it was only a matter of time until Debbie became another prize catch!

Leonard J. Kohl's interview with Kate Phillips (aka Kay Linaker) and her memories of Ricardo Cortez, Mary Astor, Tod Browning, and James Whale was a delight and left me wanting more, which as it turns out we'll be getting in the next installment! Chris Pustorino's Julie Harris interview was also enjoyable, a wealth of her thoughts and experiences with icons of stage and screen, she herself having long since deservedly attaining that status.

And trust Ken Hanke, the Street's resident Charlie Chan expert, to put the pros and cons of the Chan ban in perspective.

An added array of features, reviews, and news rounded out another fine issue, truly the next best thing to owning a time machine (without the Morlocks)!

Joe Winters
Richmond, IN

Bravo to Ken Hanke for deflating all of the arguments that are keeping the Charlie Chan classics off Fox Movie Channel. Until I read *THE GREAT CHARLIE CHAN BAN* in the latest issue of *Scarlet Street* (#50), I was unaware FMC had taken that action. To say I'm disappointed is putting it mildly. Frothing at the mouth is more like it.

I saw the panel discussion that accompanied the September 2003 showing and summary trashing of the four Chans FMC aired and snorted my way through all the talk. Hanke is absolutely correct—the discussion never stuck to the point and seemed more like a platform for everything its members want to complain about or promote about the status of Chinese-American artists. I will agree they have a point, but to deprive what *Forgotten Horrors* authors George Turner, Mike Price, and John Wooley called "unapologetic fans" of our enjoyment of these films has taken the PC mentality beyond reasonable discussion and into utter censorship. After all, the Chans were one of the main reasons I watch FMC. How many times can you watch *SAY FOR ONE ME*?

As I read Hanke's article, I recalled watching James Clavell's *FIVE GATES TO HELL* on FMC a few months ago. It's an action/adventure story set in 1950 Vietnam. Not only is the lead Vietnamese played by all-American Neville Brand, but the stereotype of the lustful Asian man wanting to mate with white women

runs rampant through the story (although on the whole, it's not bad and has a rather interesting feminist viewpoint). Now, has the Vietnamese-American community protested FMC's showing of this film because of the negative images of Asians it contains and because the lead role is played by a non-Asian? I think not. Continual carping about the Chan films and the stereotypes of Chinese and Chinese-Americans has never held water with me, first because they derive from an era where Hollywood was an equal opportunity offender, and none of the portrayals of minor ethnic characters in films of the time were to be taken seriously. Comic relief, probably. Bad taste, very likely. But get over it, folks. Secondly, as Keye Luke so aptly put it, Charlie Chan was not only a positive, but a heroic role model. That also applies to Peter Lorre's Mr. Moto and Boris Karloff's Mr. Wong. Were any other Asians given such opportunities at the time to become the lead characters in a movie series? The truth is, Fox and Monogram did nobly by Charlie by making more than 40 films about him over a 20-year period.

The *Forgotten Horrors* gang summed it up best in number three of the series: The only bad Charlie Chan is no Charlie Chan. So, until FMC changes its mind or more of the Chans are available on video and DVD, I and other "unapologetic fans" will have to settle for the bad. And more's the pity.

Kevin E. Kelly
Vinton, OH

As an unapologetic Bing Crosby and Debbie Reynolds fan, even I can only take so much of *SAY ONE FOR ME*!

Having been a fan of the Basil Rathbone/Sherlock Holmes movies since the mid-fifties, and having, in those pre-VCR days, copied the sound portions of the films from TV onto open reel tape, and having subsequently preserved them on VHS tape and—more!—having collected the radio broadcasts on LP, these UCLA restorations on DVD seem to complete the association. And, not only that, revived, once again, my enthusiasm for these wonderful movies.

Mr. Valley, your erudite and impeccably researched notes contain so much information and remind me of two books in my library: *Sherlock Holmes on the Screen* by Robert W. Pohle Jr. and Douglas C. Hart, and *The Films of Sherlock Holmes* by Chris Steinbrunner and Norman Michaels. You are undoubtedly familiar with these, the latter fleshing out a bit more the plot summaries and contemporary reviews. Your backgrounds on the supporting players, sidetracks into related mystery and horror films and the immediate assimilation of the milieu of the plots are all commendable—and enlightening. I was unaware, for instance, of Lionel Atwill's sexual predilections; I think he is excellent, if critically overlooked, in *CAPTAIN BLOOD*, my favorite film. Hillary Brooke's compliment that Rathbone was such a nice man reinforces my own admiration for him (I have an LP of him reading Poe),

yet his shunning autograph seekers who greeted him as "Sherlock Holmes" somewhat mars the image. What a great swashbuckling villain he is, too—in, yes, *CAPTAIN BLOOD*, but also in *THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD* and *THE MARK OF ZORRO*. Doyle's offer for readers to list the 12 Holmes adventures they thought the best almost prompted me to submit my suggestions—as if, I suppose, I thought it were 1927! Well, I am a person who lives much in the past, as I usually prefer it—notably the 19th century, which, to a romantic at least, seems like the greatest century.

Commendable, too, is your thorough knowledge of the source material (what an awful expression, eh?) of the Doyle adventures; i.e. referring to *THE SCARLET CLAW* as a story "... which would just as easily take place in the Cornwall of 'The Devil's Foot' ..." and your delineation of all the piratings, say, in *THE HOUSE OF FEAR*, including (which I hadn't considered) the death threat idea from *Treasure Island*. By the way—in a painless injection of my own ego (no, I swear, this won't hurt)—I have always felt that, in the coded message of "The Dancing Men," Doyle was influenced by Poe's "The Gold Bug," written over 50 years earlier—not a death threat, but a guide to treasure.

SHERLOCK HOLMES FACES DEATH has always been a favorite of the Universal dozen—for its atmosphere, for Halliwell Hobbes' performance (mainly the scene in the rocking chair when he taunts the Musgraves) and, above all, for the incantation during a thunderstorm, with Strickfaden's special effects. I was unaware that T. S. Eliot admitted borrowing from "The Musgrave Ritual" when writing *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*. Bertram Millhauser's alteration of the Ritual is clearly more poetic and seductive than Doyle's, though from Holmes' vague instructions to his human chess pieces, I doubt any serious moves could actually uncover anything. Dr. Sexton's position, king bishop three, could have been—correctly—the king's knight's first move.

My second favorite film in the set is *THE SCARLET CLAW*, which I concede is the best of the Universal set—though I realize, of course, that the two Fox films are superior still. Following these two are *THE PEARL OF DEATH* and *SPIDER WOMAN* and, at a considerable distance, *THE HOUSE OF FEAR*. David Stuart Davies' commentary is equal in quality to your notes, but I disagree with him that *SHERLOCK HOLMES IN WASHINGTON* is the least successful of the lot. Although the New World departure from much that is Holmesian is detrimental in this film, I feel *PURSUIT TO ALGIERS* is the weakest.

In watching *THE HOUSE OF FEAR*, I found a continuity error: at 29:16, Holmes opens some double doors, his pipe in his mouth; an instant later, with a cut to the second room, as he passes through the doors, the pipe is in his right hand!

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CHARLIE CHAN

Continued from page 24

new screenwriter, George Callahan—so new, in fact, that his first writing credit is CHARLIE CHAN IN THE SECRET SERVICE. What Callahan lacked in experience and polish, he more than made up for in loopy invention. The world of Callahan's Chan was a decidedly strange one in which corpses could be rigged up like puppets to give the illusion of still being alive (THE JADE MASK), bullets could be made from frozen blood in order to disappear in the body (CHARLIE CHAN IN BLACK MAGIC), and poison gasses only worked if the victim smoked a cigarette after inhaling them (THE SCARLET CLUE).

For the first five films, direction was handed over to Monogram veteran Phil Rosen, a cinematographer and director from the early days of movies, whose silent credits include a respected biopic, ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1924), and an adaptation of John Galsworthy's THE WHITE MONKEY (1925). By the talkie era, though, Rosen was working for Poverty Row outfits such as Continental Talking Pictures and producers such as Trem Carr, who would also end up at Monogram. Rosen was knocking out some of the studio's lesser Bela Lugosi pictures by the time the Monogram Chans rolled around. His handling of the Chans isn't markedly different—efficient, but hardly creative, though credit must be given for his achieving considerable atmosphere with lighting and occasional fog effects on a very limited budget. His are not the best of the Monogram Chans—check out the set's concluding title, THE SHANGHAI COBRA, for an example of those—but they very much set the tone and in some respects represent the series as most of us remember it.

Despite the spare nature of the Monogram series, the films remain charming mysteries, with Toler in fine form as the

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classic detective. They're a must for admirers of Charlie Chan and aficionados of the mystery genre in general. So join Charlie, his various offspring, and Birmingham Brown for a nostalgic good time that looks and sounds better than it has in years.

—Ken Hanke

SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 80

Music is a major consideration for me, especially in the films of the thirties and forties. I'm always amazed by most critics' reviews, where scores rarely seem essential enough to mention, whether good or bad. Frank Skinner, Paul Sawtell, and Hans J. Salter all added their touches to the Universal series. I'm inclined to believe Franz Waxman's music, perhaps is interpolated in some of these scores, as it is in the other Universal films of the period. Interesting, too, to hear how often the same music is reused, again and again. It was music in a movie that ignited my real, first, and lasting passion—no, not the movies, but classical music as used in 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA, more specifically the toccata from J. S. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, BWV565.

Again, my compliments on your notes. I must apologize for taking so much of your time—and thank you for contributing to such a fine creative project. By the way, congratulations on the 50th issue anniversary of *Scarlet Street*.

James D. Maffett
Lakeland, FL

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SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 77

12-year-old). Peter Duchin, of course, would go on to make his mark as a popular New York pianist and band leader whose accomplishments would match his dad's. (There hasn't been a PETER DUCHIN STORY, by the way, proving that times have indeed changed.)

THE EDDY DUCHIN STORY includes a fleeting guest appearance by band leader Xavier Cugat as himself, the requisite "loyal and sensible best friend" role for James Whitmore, a thoroughly worthless part for Frieda Inescort as Novak's aunt, and supposedly an appearance by future Oscar-winner Jack Albertson as a piano tuner, though the actor is positioned so far in the background that few will spot him. There's a little in-joke worth mentioning: Samuel Taylor, who wrote the script, has one of the Long Island socialites casually mention a "Linus Larrabee." This is the name of the character played by Humphrey Bogart in SABRINA (1954), which was scripted by Taylor, Billy Wilder, and Ernest Lehman from Taylor's play, SABRINA FAIR.

Though there's nothing startlingly original about this movie, it's fairly pleasant to sit through. The music is good and New York City is wonderfully captured by Harry Stradling's stunning color location photography, which earned him a well-deserved Academy Award nomination. Fortunately, the Columbia DVD transfer does justice to his work, presenting the CinemaScope film in a letterboxed format with a print that looks sharp and pristine. The extras are an original trailer for this film and one for the biopic Power had appeared in for Columbia the previous year, John Ford's THE LONG GRAY LINE.

—Barry Monush

MUSICALS AND MORE

Continued from page 61

hand." *Loophole*: "How will you eat—through a tube?"), and any film that shoots Dumont out of a cannon has its anarchic heart in the right place.

There are other magic moments, including a scene in which Punchy (Harpo) and Tony Pirelli (Chico) invade the sleeping quarters of Goliath (Nat Pendleton) in search of some stolen loot. Paying scant attention to the possibility that they might awaken the strong man, they repaint the compartment (Punchy pours iodine on his hand and uses it as a paint brush) and, with the help of a fan and pillow feathers, transform the room into a winter wonderland complete with Sanity Claus.

Eve Arden is sadly wasted in the role of Peerless Pauline, the villain's girlfriend, but *AT THE CIRCUS* still has quite a lot to offer, including one of Groucho's signature songs—E. Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen's "Lydia the Tattooed Lady." And Harpo makes his entrance with one of the rudest sexual jokes ever perpetrated by that "family studio," MGM.

GO WEST is the obligatory cowboys and injuns spoof tackled by most movie comics, but it would have been far better had the Marxes stayed home off the range. The opening routine—a variation on *RACES'* tootsie frootsie scene—in which Joe and Rusty Pannello (Chico and Harpo) balk S. Quentin Quayle (Groucho) of a little traveling money holds promise, but it's the last truly Marxian moment in the film. Yes, the train chase finale is a classic, but it's a classic that could have been performed by any team, not just the Marxes.

GO WEST gets the Marx characters so wrong that *THE BIG STORE* is practically a return to form—not top form, admittedly, but at least a recognizable form. Dumont is back and—surprisingly—her scenes with Groucho are not only funny, but warm and charming. As wealthy Martha Phelps, she hires private detective Wolf J. Flywheel (Groucho) to protect Tommy Rogers (Tony Martin), who's about to inherit part ownership in the Phelps Department Store. Unfortunately, Flywheel's not much of a gumshoe and his assistant is just plain Wacky (Harpo). Tommy's pal Ravelli (Chico) lends a hand, and the threesome even keep Tommy from being killed after he sings the bizarre "Tenement Symphony." Douglass Dumbrille, who'd battled the Marxes in *A DAY AT THE RACES*, returns in *STORE*, this time as the murderous Mr. Grover, and blank-faced Virginia O'Brien is on hand to join Groucho and Harpo in a rollicking "Sing While You Sell." (The songs are by Hal Borne, Sid Kuller, Ray Golden, and Hal Fimberg.) It was the Marx Brothers' last MGM outing, and other clowns have suffered far worse send-offs.

Between MGM assignments, the Brothers rang for *ROOM SERVICE* at RKO. Based on the 1937 Broadway farce by Allen Boretz and John Murray, the film

was something of an experiment, shoehorning the Marxes into "straight" roles created by Sam Levene, Philip Loeb, and Teddy Hart on the stage. (Loeb's role of Harry Binion is rechristened Harry Binelli for Chico.) It doesn't entirely work, and too much action is confined to a single claustrophobic hotel room, but there are still quite a few laughs. Lucille Ball and Ann Miller lend decorative support.

Following the MGM years came two more starring features—*A NIGHT IN CASABLANCA* and *LOVE HAPPY* (1950). In the first—part of the Warner Bros. package—the Marxes are reunited with former adversary Sig Ruman, who comically opposed them in *OPERA* and *RACES*. Here, Ruman is the singularly uncomical Nazi Heinrich Stubel, searching the Hotel Casablanca for hidden art treasures and bumping off any hotel managers who stand in his path. Enter the new manager—Ronald Kornblow (Groucho). Some good scenes are almost scuttled by Werner Janssen's wholly inappropriate background score, and the airplane-chase finale barely gets off the ground, but the film offers some choice moments. (*Lisette Verrea*, as *Beatrice Rheiner*: "I'm Beatrice Rheiner. I stop at the hotel." *Kornblow*: "I'm Ronald Kornblow. I stop at nothing.")

LOVE HAPPY (Lionsgate/Fox, \$14.98) was planned as a solo vehicle for Harpo (he concocted the story), but the ever-insolvent Chico was signed on as Faustino the Great in order to put some cash in his pocket. Soon, Groucho joined in as the film's narrator, detective Sam Grunion. The plot centers on the stolen Romanoff diamonds, hidden in a can of sardines and subsequently pinched by Harpo, who shoplifts to help feed his struggling show biz friends (played by Vera-Ellen, Paul Valentine, and Marion Hutton). On the trail of the sparklers is Madame Egelichi (Ilona Massey, effective as a Sondergaardish Spider Woman), and on the trail of Madame Egelichi is Sam Grunion—that is, when he isn't giving a curvaceous client (Marilyn Monroe) the benefit of his eagle eye.

There's not enough Groucho in *LOVE HAPPY*, but the way he swoops down on the scene during the film's chase finale is irresistible. The traditional Harpo and Chico charades routine is a good one. When Madame Egelichi asks him to collect sardine cans for her, Chico replies with one of the great non sequiturs of his career. ("Sardines? Hah—that'sa nothing! I'm going to cover you with sardines—that's how much I love'a you!") And though he's given some Chaplinesque pathos that's wrong for his character, Harpo has some choice material to work with, including some surreal moments ("Clear your head!") the likes of which he hadn't had in years.

There are no extras on the *LOVE*



There's a banquet for Allan Jones, Chico Marx, and Harpo Marx in *A NIGHT AT THE OPERA* (1935), but no tootsie frootsie ice-a cream.

HAPPY DVD, but there's something much better—several minutes of rare footage restored to the film itself, some of it featuring Groucho, and including one scene in which henchman Alphonse Zoto (Raymond Burr) "tortures" Harpo in a washing machine.

The Warner Bros. box set contains enough goodies to qualify as a pinata, including two documentaries, two audio commentaries (Leonard Maltin on *OPERA*, Glenn Mitchell on *RACES*), several Robert Benchley short subjects (including the 1935 Oscar-winning *HOW TO SLEEP*), audio outtakes from *RACES* (not, unfortunately, the song "Dr. Hackenbush"), cartoons, a Pete Smith Specialty, radio promos, trailers, outtakes, and other vintage shorts.

Postscript: The Wheel of Time turns and in 2004 we find Warner Bros. releasing on DVD a picture that the studio tried to keep from being filmed in 1946. When Warners learned that the Marxes had signed to star in *A NIGHT IN CASABLANCA*, its legal department threatened to sue. The studio, after all, had produced *CASABLANCA* (1942), and the Marxes evidently planned to cash in on its success. Typically, Groucho had the last word. He wrote Warners, explaining the plot of the new film:

"I play a Doctor of Divinity who ministers to the natives and, as a sideline, hawks can openers and pea jackets to the savages along the Gold Coast of Africa. When I first meet Chico, he is working in a saloon, selling sponges to barflies who are unable to carry their liquor. Harpo is an Arabian caddie who lives in a small Grecian urn on the outskirts of the city."

Warners was nonplussed. Groucho responded:

"In the new version, I play Bordello, the sweetheart of Humphrey Bogart. Harpo and Chico are itinerant rug peddlers who are weary of laying rugs and enter a monastery just for a lark. This is a good joke on them as there hasn't been a lark in the place for 15 years. . . . Harpo marries a hotel detective; Chico operates an ostrich farm. Humphrey Bogart's girl, Bordello, spends her last years in a Bacall house."

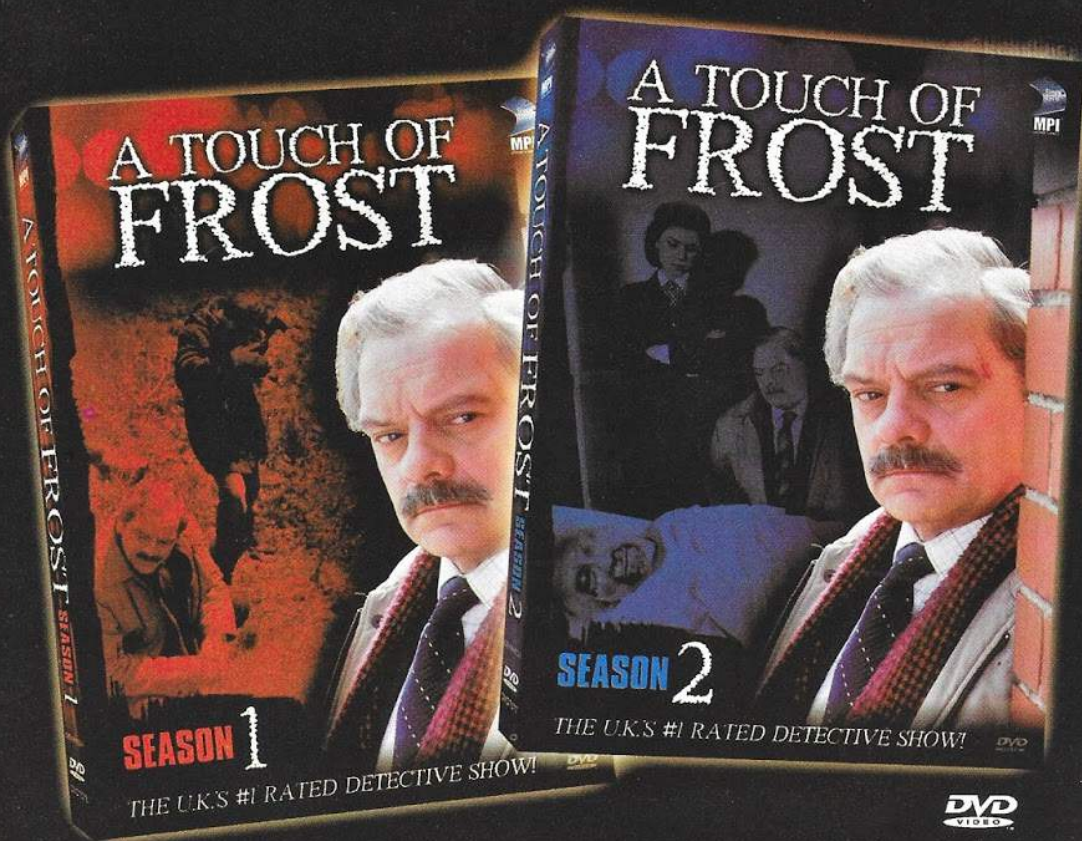
Warners gave up.



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A MESSAGE FROM THE UCLA FILM AND TELEVISION ARCHIVE

The twelve "modern" Sherlock Holmes films included in this DVD series were originally produced by Universal Pictures sixty years ago, during and just after World War II. Universal's rights expired in the early 1950's, and subsequently the ownership of the films changed hands many times. As a result of this, the storage of the original 35mm nitrate picture and soundtrack negatives and the 35mm nitrate protection master copies made from these negatives was haphazard at best.

Nitrate film is inherently unstable, and many reels of the original Sherlock Holmes negatives deteriorated over the years – the picture became stained and faded, and the film base began to turn sticky and gooey before collapsing into a brownish powder. Fortunately, backup copies on nitrate fine grain master positive film had been made when the films were first produced, but these copies also began to deteriorate over the decades, and today many of the reels of nitrate master positive picture and sound no longer exist.

However, all was not lost because television distributors in the 1960's and 1970's made 35mm and 16mm safety copies of the films on early acetate stock. These copies were flawed in that they lacked the original main and end titles for all of the films in the series, and in addition many of them had only mediocre picture and sound quality. During the past decade, some of these acetate master positive prints and duplicate negatives have become limp and warped because of another type of deterioration known as "vinegar syndrome," so-called because the decaying film gives off a strong odor of acetic acid and smells like salad dressing.

Because large numbers of individual reels of picture and sound of various generations were lost or survive only in a deteriorating state, the quality of the current restorations also varies. In some instances, the original nitrate camera negative is still available intact and the picture quality is excellent; in other cases, the only available elements are copies that are many generations removed from the original. Today, it is possible by means of "wet printing" to eliminate or reduce the appearance of scratches in old and worn films, but many of the Sherlock Holmes elements made years ago were printed "dry" and as a result some blemishes and flaws are photographically built-in to the film.

The current versions of these movies, assembled from materials found in England, France and America, are full length, and include all of the original main and end titles. Even the concluding announcement asking audiences to purchase war bonds on their way out of the theater is there. Though every effort has been made to restore each of the films to the best possible quality, inevitably some parts of the series look and sound better than others because of the ravages of time.

Sherlock Holmes

IN PEARL of DEATH



"Sir Arthur Conan Doyle makes the interesting announcement that from the forty-four Sherlock Holmes stories already published in book form in four volumes, he has selected the twelve stories which he considers the best, and he now invites readers to do likewise. A sealed copy of this list is now in the Editor's possession, and a prize of £100 and an autographed copy of Sir A. Conan Doyle's *Memories and Adventures* is offered to the sender of the coupon which coincides most nearly with this list. In the event of ties the prize of £100 will be divided. The actual order of the stories will not be regarded. Autographed copies of *Memories and Adventures* will also be awarded to 100 readers submitting the next nearly correct coupon."

The above appeared in the March 1927 issue of *The Strand Magazine*, which, with the following issue, would run the very last Holmes adventure: "Shoscombe Old Place." The stories chosen by Conan Doyle were "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), "The Red-Headed League" (1891), "The Five Orange Pips" (1891), "The Speckled Band" (1892), "The Musgrave Ritual" (1893), "The Reigate Squires" (1893), "The Final Problem" (1893), "The Empty House" (1903), "The Dancing Men" (1903), "The Priory School" (1904), "The Second Stain" (1904), and "The Devil's Foot" (1910). Seven additional tales received honorable mention: "The Man With the Twisted Lip" (1891), "Silver Blaze" (1892), "The Crooked Man" (1893), "The Resident Patient" (1893), "The Greek Interpreter" (1893), "The Naval Treaty" (1893), and "The Bruce-Partington Plans" (1908). When the dust had settled, the contest had only one winner (Mr. R. T. Norman) and the best he could manage was 10 out of the 12 stories.

Conan Doyle's list holds few surprises. "The Reigate Squires," a minor entry in the eyes of most Sherlockians, is one, and the other is "The Five Orange Pips," whose reputation has soured over the passing years. In 1944, 1954, and 1959, the Baker Street Irregulars (the Sherlock Holmes

"I DON'T LIKE THE SMELL OF YOU—AN UNDERGROUND SMELL, THE SICK SWEETNESS OF DECAY. YOU HAVEN'T ROBBED AND KILLED MERELY FOR THE GAME LIKE ANY ORDINARY, HALFWAY DECENT THUG. NO, YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH CRUELTY FOR ITS OWN SAKE."
—THE PEARL OF DEATH

society established by Christopher Morley in 1933) compiled their own tallies of the best stories. "The Reigate Squires" appears on none of the three lists, and "The Five Orange Pips" vanishes after 1944, supplanted by a story that — rather remarkably — was snubbed in 1927 and 1944, and didn't even appear among Conan Doyle's second-stringers: the much-anthologized "The Six Napoleons" (1904).

Coincidentally, in the same year that the Irregulars' first list appeared, Universal Pictures produced *THE PEARL OF DEATH*, the seventh in its series of Sherlock Holmes films starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. Screenwriter Bertram Millhauser based his script on "The Six Napoleons." The studio followed *PEARL* in 1945 with the eighth entry: *THE HOUSE OF FEAR*, based on "The Five Orange Pips." That *THE PEARL OF DEATH* is considered one of the best in the series — superior to *HOUSE OF FEAR*, though the latter is far from dull — may have nothing to do with the subsequent esteem showered on "Napoleons" and corresponding decrease in the reputation of "Pips." Then again, it might. In the early sixties, British television played host to two series of Sherlock Holmes adventures, the first (in 1964-'65) starring Douglas Wilmer and the second (in 1968) with Peter Cushing. "Napoleons" aired in 1965, but neither series featured "Pips." Two decades later, when the time came for Granada International to produce its own Holmes series starring Jeremy Brett, "Napoleons" proved one of the most popular episodes. "Pips," rated a weak sister, again wasn't filmed. *THE PEARL OF DEATH* had proven the value of "The Six Napoleons" as film fodder.

Both Conan Doyle's "Napoleons" and Universal's *PEARL* concern the Borgia Pearl, a priceless treasure whose owners invariably court death with its acquisition. The bauble is stolen and the thief, desperate to hide it before the police arrest him, presses it into the wet plaster of one of six busts of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Little Corporal. The statuettes are sold, and death, destruction, and Corporal punishment follow as the thief and Sherlock Holmes race to find the bust with the prize inside. Thus endeth the resemblance

between story and film.

You won't find most of the *PEARL* principles in "Napoleons," though Inspector Lestrade (played onscreen by Dennis Hoey) features prominently in both. The short story's villainy stems from the Mafia and a crazed crook named Beppo. Missing are *PEARL*'s unholy three — Giles Conover (Miles Mander), Naomi Drake (Evelyn Ankers), and The Hoxton Creeper (Rondo Hatton), memorable baddies played by a uniquely varied trio of actors.

Born in 1888, Miles Mander was an all-purpose character man whose two roles in the Holmes series ran the gamut from "v" to "v" — that is, villain (Giles Conover) to victim (Judge Brisson in 1944's *THE SCARLET CLAW*). If Conover isn't quite the Moriarty he's made out to be by Sherlock Holmes (in dialogue lifted from "The Final Problem"), he's still a worthy adversary. Mander, whose earliest vocation before becoming a novelist, playwright, producer, director, and actor was that of sheep farmer, died in 1946, having racked up impressive credits in such films as Alfred Hitchcock's *THE PLEASURE GARDEN* (1925) and *MURDER* (1930); *THE MISSING REMBRANDT* (1932, with Arthur Wontner as Sherlock); *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* (1933); *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* (1939); *TO BE OR NOT TO BE* (1942); *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* (1943); *MURDER, MY SWEET* (1944); and *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY* (1945).

Born 30 years after Mander, horror heroine Evelyn Ankers found herself in the unaccustomed role of evildoer in *THE PEARL OF DEATH* — though it wasn't so terribly unaccustomed in 1944, the 26-year-old beauty having earlier that year played the scheming Ilona Carr in Universal's Inner Sanctum thriller *WEIRD WOMAN*. Still, Ankers was usually on the receiving end of the monstrous mischief practiced by Lon Chaney Jr. as The Wolf Man (1941's *THE WOLF MAN*), The Frankenstein Monster (1942's *THE GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN*), and Count Dracula (1943's *SON OF DRACULA*). She also found time to be menaced by ape-woman Paula Dupree (played by Acquafredda in 1943's *CAPTIVE WILD WOMAN*), The Mad Ghoul (David Bruce in 1943's *THE MAD GHOUL*), and The Invisible Man (Jon Hall in 1944's *THE INVISIBLE*

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2. "DEVOTEDLY, S.H."
3. ANOTHER MORIARTY
4. A MIRACLE OF HORROR
5. LESTRADE'S GRAVY TRAIN
6. THE FIRST VICTIM
7. "PURE DEDUCTIVE REASONING."
8. ENTER THE CREEPER
9. THE SIX NAPOLEONS
10. EXIT NAOMI DRAKE
11. THE PEARL OF DEATH
12. END CREDITS

PEARL OF DEATH

MAN'S REVENGE). Following her lead role in *THE TEXAN MEETS CALAMITY JANE* (1950, Ankers retired with husband Richard Denning to Hawaii, where she died in 1985. In *PEARL*, Naomi Drake refers to having previously been terrorized by the lovelorn Hoxton Creeper. Given Ankers' celluloid history, the remark makes it all the more surprising that the two characters never share a single scene.

Strange are the ways of fame, and in the 1970s rocker Frank Zappa would often introduce himself on stage as Rondo Hatton. A bootleg exists of Zappa and other musicians performing as The Rondo Hatton Band, recorded live in 1974 at the Capitol Theater in Passaic, New Jersey. Actor Farnham Scott recalls: "At a concert in Ohio's Sports Arena in Toledo many years ago, Frank Zappa appeared on a bill with ex-Belmont Dion DeMucci. During his part of the show, Zappa mentioned Rondo Hatton and I laughed. I was the only one to do so and Zappa acknowledged me by saying, 'Well, at least one Famous Monster is here.' I felt so proud!"

That Scott was alone among thousands in recalling Hatton is sadly typical of the "stardom" achieved by Universal's strangest horror icon. Hatton's screen career was brief and predicated entirely on his remarkable ugliness, the result of the disfiguring disease acromegaly. A popular high-school athlete in Tampa, Florida (where his family moved in 1912, when Hatton was 18), the future Creeper excelled at such velocious sports as track, football, and baseball. Following a brief stint at the University of Florida, Hatton went to war, fighting with the National Guard in the Mexican Border War. He concluded his service in France, where he became one of many victims of poison gas. Discharged, Hatton turned to journalism, writing for the Tampa Tribune and the Tampa Daily Times.

By 1930, Hatton's facial deformities had progressed to the point where, when he arrived on the set of *HELL HARBOR* to cover the filming, director Henry King immediately cast him as a dance-hall bouncer. Bitten by the acting bug — though he wisely never considered himself an actor — Hatton journeyed to Hollywood in 1936 and was immediately cast by King in the 20th

Century Fox disaster epic *IN OLD CHICAGO*. There followed bit parts in such popular pictures as *ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND* (1938, again for King), *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* (1939, as one of the contenders for the title "King of Fools"), *THE OX-BOW INCIDENT* (1943), and *THE MOON AND SIXPENCE* (1943, as a leper).

Universal cast Hatton to great effect as The Hoxton Creeper. Hoping to eliminate the middle man — in this case, Jack Pierce, creator of *Frankenstein's Monster*, *The Wolf Man*, and *The Mummy* — the studio decided to make Hatton a horror star, one who didn't have to waste valuable time in the makeup chair. (Pierce was still kept busy on the Holmes film, since it featured two disguises for Rathbone, two for Mander, and three for Ankers.) Universal cast Hatton in four fright films following *PEARL*, in two of which he played a killer called The Creeper. The actor's death in 1946, coinciding with the final wheezes of the forties horror boom, brought an end to Universal's less than grandiose — and decidedly insensitive — plans.

Rondo Hatton resurfaced on the silver screen some 45 years later — or his face did, anyway. In the 1991 Walt Disney film *THE ROCKETEER*, the high-flying hero (Bill Campbell) was stalked by a creeping menace called Lothar, played by former sports figure Tiny Ron. Ron looked exactly the way Hatton had looked as The Creeper, but the actor cheated — he wore makeup.



Sherlock Holmes

THE SCARLET CLAW



Poison, according to such illustrious sleuths as Hercule Poirot, Miss Jane Marple, Ellery Queen, and, of course, Sherlock Holmes, is a woman's weapon. Debatable, that, but it seems inarguable that the weapon of choice for Universal Pictures was, of all outre objects, the five-pronged garden weeder. The horticultural accoutrement turns up in no less than three studio programmers of the 1940s: *THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGET* (1942), based on the Edgar Allan Poe story; *SHE-WOLF OF LONDON* (1946), a whodunit dressed up in the lycanthropic trappings of Universal's trademark horror films; and, betwixt and between, *THE SCARLET CLAW* (1944), in which Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John H. Watson journey to Canada and solve a gruesome string of murders apparently perpetrated by a legendary swamp monster.

Shades of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* — and that's precisely the point. With *THE SCARLET CLAW*, Universal abandoned all attempts to shoe-horn Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic characters into the too-real terrors of World War II and returned them to their Victorian roots — in style and content, if not in actual time frame. Elements of horror had always played a vital role in the canon, notably in *The Sign of Four* (1890), "The Speckled Band" (1892), "The Engineer's Thumb" (1892), "The Cardboard Box" (1893), "The Yellow Face" (1893), "The Devil's Foot" (1910), "The Creeping Man" (1923), "The Sussex Vampire" (1924), and "The Lion's Mane" (1926), and never more so than in the aforementioned *Hound*, the 1902 novel that returned Sherlock Holmes to *The Strand Magazine* after almost a decade in limbo at the foot of the Reichenbach Falls.

THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGET is commensurate with *THE SCARLET CLAW* not only in its imaginative employment of garden tools, but because its protagonist is a Great Detective — the first Great Detective, in fact, created by Poe in the 1841 short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." C. Auguste Dupin is a sleuth for whom Sherlock

1. OPEN
2. FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
3. "RETAINED BY A CORPSE."
4. JOURNET INTERRUPTED
5. WATSON INCONSPICUOUS
6. SHERLOCK HOLMES BAFFLED
7. THE DOG IN THE DAY TIME
8. THE MAN WITH THE LIMP
9. DRESSED TO KILL
10. FINAL ACTS
11. END CREDITS

"CONSIDER, WATSON, THE IRONY, THE TRAGIC IRONY. WE'RE ACCEPTING A COMMISSION FROM THE VICTIM TO FIND HER MURDERER. FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE'VE BEEN RETAINED BY A CORPSE."

—THE SCARLET CLAW

Holmes — ruminating in 1887's *A Study in Scarlet* — holds no high regard. ("No doubt you think that you are complementing me in comparing me to Dupin . . . Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends' thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour's silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.") Poe followed "Rue Morgue" with "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842), again featuring Dupin, and returned to the character a third and final time for "The Purloined Letter" (1844). "Marie Roget" was inspired by an actual crime, the murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers, whose body was found in the Hudson River near Weehawken, New Jersey on July 28, 1841. Needless to say, Rogers had not been killed by a five-pronged garden weeder, and neither had the Marie Roget of Poe's original tale. (However — as in the film — she had been mutilated.)

Universal took further liberties with its source material by transforming Poe's solitary Dupin (whose only friend appears to be the nameless, Watsonesque narrator of the stories) into the comparatively dashing Dr. Paul Dupin (Patric Knowles), a medical officer with the Paris constabulary. He's teamed with Prefect of Police Gobel (Lloyd Corrigan) in a partnership blatantly patterned after the studio version of Holmes and Watson. (Had Universal not decided to downsize its B-movie output in 1946, it might well have considered replacing its star detectives with Dupin and Gobel when Basil Rathbone — much to Nigel Bruce's displeasure — chose to abandon the Holmes series that same year.)

Like *THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGET* (story and film), *THE SCARLET CLAW* is très Français, though it takes place in the fictitious Canadian village of La Morte Rouge (tellingly Poe, that) and not Paris. The characters even include a young girl named Marie Journet (played by Kay Harding), who, like Marie Roget, is murdered. Since the setting is not essential to *CLAW*'s story (which could just as easily take place in the Cornwall of "The Devil's Foot" or the Scottish mists that shroud Brigadoon),

it's probable that the French dressing came courtesy of Universal's Poe adaptation — but only after considerable tinkering with the Holmes film's original script. The picture had begun life as a screenplay by Paul Gangelin and Brenda Weisberg titled *SHERLOCK HOLMES VERSUS MORIARTY*, but the Napoleon of Crime was eventually exiled from the plot. Producer/director Roy William Neill teamed with Edmund L. Hartmann (and an uncredited Tom McKnight) and completely rewrote the story as *SHERLOCK HOLMES IN CANADA*, changing the drab, travelogue tone of the title to the much more blood-and-thunder *THE SCARLET CLAW*.

The film opens with a ghastly murder, echoing the death of Sir Charles Baskerville at the beginning of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Lady Penrose (Gertrude Astor) has been cruelly attacked, presumably by a luminous phantom fiend. She crawls to the church and dies tolling the bell for help. With a nod toward Arthur Conan Doyle's interest (and belief) in spiritualism, *CLAW* next turns to Holmes and Watson, visiting Quebec to address the Royal Canadian Occult Society, whose members include Lord William Penrose (Paul Cavanagh). Penrose recounts the legend of La Morte Rouge, that of a monster who killed three villagers in the previous century and has returned to slaughter a few sheep. Holmes is skeptical, but word soon arrives that Lady Penrose has gone the way of all fleece. Preparing to leave Quebec, Holmes receives a letter from the dead woman, postmarked before her demise and begging for assistance. It's through Lady Penrose that the visitors from Baker Street are drawn into the case and meet the residents of La Morte Rouge, one of whom is a vicious, vindictive killer. (Warning: those who haven't seen the film before turning to these notes should do so now, since all will shortly be revealed.)

Though the Rathbone/Bruce films (both the Universal and 20th Century Fox entries) are categorized as mysteries, fully half are not whodunits, but howdunits, whydunits, or even whatdunits. It's no great secret that Professor James Moriarty is the malignant brain behind the felonies perpetrated in *ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES* (1939),

THE SCARLET CLAW

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE SECRET WEAPON (1942), and *THE WOMAN IN GREEN* (1945). Nor is it left to the viewer to deduce the identity of the villains in *SPIDER WOMAN* (1944), *THE PEARL OF DEATH* (1944), *PURSUIT TO ALGIERS* (1945), and *DRESSED TO KILL* (1946). *THE SCARLET CLAW*, however, asks all the traditional questions, including who, and presents a village choked with suspects — up to and including a butler, played by series veteran Ian Wolfe.

"As a rule, I don't watch my old films," Wolfe told interviewer Bernard O'Heir, shortly before the actor's death in 1992. "So many people I worked with are gone, and it gives me a funny feeling — I don't know why I'm still alive! It's been years since I saw *THE SCARLET CLAW*. I don't usually like myself when I do see one of my performances, but I thought I was pretty damned good in that. My character goes to the local pub and gets stewed, and it was a pretty good scene for me. I have good memories of making the film, and I enjoyed working with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce, that old scene stealer."

The pub scenes introduce such other suspects as landlord Emile Journet (Arthur Hohl), Father Pierre (George Kirby), and the postman, Potts (Gerald Hamer). Elsewhere in the village, there's the reclusive Judge Brisson (Miles Mander), who never leaves home; a mysterious workman named Jack Tanner; and Lord Penrose himself. The culprit turns out to be an actor named Alastair Ramson, who once killed a man for love of Lady Penrose (who was herself an actress in the killer's company). Holmes deduces that Ramson has established himself in La Morte Rouge under a number of false identities, and exposes him in the final scenes as not only the brutish Tanner, but the meek, mild Potts.

Born in South Wales in 1886, Gerald Hamer made his first film at the age of 49, in the British *THREE WITNESSES* (1935). The following year, he made his Hollywood debut in the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers musical *SWING TIME* (1936). He played mostly minor parts before taking the role of British agent Alfred Pettibone in *SHERLOCK HOLMES IN WASHINGTON* (1943) and becoming a valued member of Roy William Neill's stock

company. Hamer's specialty was a shy, gentle diffidence that served him well as a shell-shocked war hero (in 1943's *SHERLOCK HOLMES FACES DEATH*), a preoccupied archeologist (in 1945's *PURSUIT TO ALGIERS*), and a guilt-ridden collector of hotel souvenirs (in 1946's *TERROR BY NIGHT*). It proved equally ideal in hiding the murderous zeal of the soft-spoken Potts. (In addition to Potts, Tanner, and Ramson, Hamer also briefly impersonates Judge Brisson's housekeeper, Nora, otherwise played by Victoria Horne.)

Gerald Hamer died in 1972 at the age of 86, after racking up credits that included two brief encounters (in 1944's *THE LODGER* and a 1957 episode of *ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS*) with Jack the Ripper, the notorious real-life psychopath who terrorized London's Whitechapel district when Hamer — the future Jack the Weeder — was a mere child of two.



Sherlock Holmes

IN THE SPIDER WOMAN



1. OPEN
2. THE PAJAMA SUICIDES
3. THE DEATH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES
4. A FEMALE MORIARTY
5. LUCK BE A LADY
6. "JUST ADREA."
7. THE PAJAMA GAME
8. THE SPIDER WOMAN STRIKES BACK
9. SPIDER MAN
10. THE SHOOTING GALLERY
11. THE MOVING TARGET
12. END CREDITS

Sherlock Holmes, cleverly disguised as an Indian military officer, has just lost a considerable sum at the roulette wheel after changing his bet on the advice of sleek, sophisticated Adrea Spedding. The woman is apologetic, but "Rahjni Singh" stoically dismisses the matter. "It is fate, madame," he explains. "One cannot fight it."

Fate — kismet — must also have played a hand in leading Gale Sondergaard to the role of Adrea Spedding, better known as the SPIDER WOMAN, the title of the 1944 film in which she appears. The Sherlock Holmes mystery was hardly the first instance of the actress being linked with arachnids. In 1939, Sondergaard had played a supporting role in the Bob Hope/Martha Raye comedy NEVER SAY DIE, as the much-married Mrs. Juno Marko, whose wealthy husbands have a habit of being shot or falling off the Matterhorn. Glancing out a hotel window as Mrs. Marko arrives on the scene, John Kidley (Hope) cries, "It's the Black Widow!" (Eight years later, in 1947's ROAD TO RIO, the comic was still referring to Sondergaard — this time in the role of Mrs. Catherine Vail — as the Black Widow.)

Fate.

Born in Litchfield, Minnesota, in 1899, Sondergaard gained professional experience — and a husband in actor/director Herbert Biberman — working with New York's famed Theatre Guild and appearing in such classics as Goethe's FAUST and Shaw's MAJOR BARBARA (both in 1928) and such long-forgotten plays as RED RUST (1929) and DOCTOR MONICA (1933). She made her Hollywood debut in the 1936 film ANTHONY ADVERSE, winning the first Best Supporting Actress Academy Award ever presented, and performed memorably — and often villainously — in THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA (1937), THE CAT AND THE CANARY (1939, also with Bob Hope), JUAREZ (1939), THE MARK OF ZORRO (1940), THE LETTER (1940), and MY FAVORITE BLONDE (1942, yet again with Hope). With her silken smile, Sondergaard surpassed all rivals at

"WHAT WAS IT, HOLMES?"

"DEATH, MY DEAR FELLOW. WE'VE BEEN ENTERTAINING MISS ADREA SPEDDING."

— THE SPIDER WOMAN

giving the impression that she had recently supped on a saucer of milk and several canaries. She was quite popular, and SPIDER WOMAN marked her 24th film in eight years. Five years and 12 films later, Sondergaard's career was all but over, the featured player of MAID OF SALEM (1937) the victim of an altogether new kind of witch hunt — one led by the House Un-American Activities Committee against anyone suspected of communism. Herbert Biberman appeared before HUAC on October 29, 1947 and, along with nine other Hollywood names, refused to answer questions. Found guilty of contempt of Congress — as were the rest of the Hollywood Ten — Biberman was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to six months in Texarkana Prison. Both he and his leftist wife were blacklisted. Sondergaard didn't step before the cameras again until 1968, when she guest-starred on an episode of television's IT TAKES A THIEF.

In the mid-1970s, this writer met Gale Sondergaard when she starred in a touring production of Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman's THE ROYAL FAMILY at The Playhouse on the Mall in New Jersey. During the week's run, she graciously answered many questions about her checkered career. In 1984, she was interviewed by writer Boze Hadleigh. The combined material appeared in a 1993 issue of Scarlet Street magazine under Hadleigh's byline, and readers were treated to Sondergaard's memories of Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, and her role as Adrea Spedding:

"Playing the Spider Woman was easy, because the characterization was up to me; she was not intricately conceived. Frankly, it was something to help pay the bills. I knew it wasn't art. I certainly didn't think it would outlast all my pictures other than THE LETTER. And I'm not sure that even THE LETTER would be so esteemed, now, if not for Bette Davis' performance. I enjoyed working with Basil Rathbone. He was a gentleman at all times — courteous and helpful, an excellent technician. It was while shooting that film that I enjoyed the refreshment of afternoon tea served in the dressing room of Nigel Bruce. They were fun and interesting.

"The role added a lighter feeling to my image, and it was nice hearing from young people. I could have wished — if this doesn't sound

ungrateful or demanding — that more young people could have been aware of the witch hunts, or cared, once they found out. I'll tell you: there was some publicity — I forget for which show — about my political times, and of course the term 'witch hunt' was used quite a bit. As a result, I received several letters from younger fans, asking the titles of the films in which I had portrayed a witch!"

(Actually, the fans weren't far off: Sondergaard had been slated to play a glittery, glamorous Wicked Witch of the West in 1939's THE WIZARD OF OZ, before the role was reconceived and given to hatchet-faced Margaret Hamilton. Instead, Sondergaard appeared in a rival fantasy, 1940's THE BLUE BIRD, in the role of Tylette — the cat.) SPIDER WOMAN begins with a series of gruesome deaths labeled "pyjama suicides" by the press. (The victims have all expired while dressed in their night clothes.) Sherlock Holmes fakes his own death, the better to investigate what he considers nothing less than murder by a "female Moriarty," and soon finds himself in a battle of wits with Adrea Spedding. (Holmes describes the crimes as "feline" — female — rather than "canine.") Adding thrills to the basic framework is a veritable "Best of Sherlock Holmes," with characters and incidents lifted from a number of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novels and short stories. The Great Detective's death stems from "The Final Problem" (1893), though he presumably dies while fishing in a mountain stream in Scotland rather than battling the Napoleon of Crime amidst the treacherous grandeur of the Reichenbach Falls. His unexpected return (in disguise) results in Dr. Watson's collapse, just as it does in "The Empty House" (1903). From The Sign of Four (1890) comes a brutal crime seemingly perpetrated by a barefoot child, but actually the work of a pygmy (played by the diminutive — and blackfaced — Angelo Rossitto, whose roles ranged from playing the Second Little Pig in 1934's BABES IN TOYLAND to partnering Bela Lugosi in such low-budget horrors as 1941's SPOOKS RUN WILD, 1942's THE CORPSE VANISHES, and 1947's SCARED TO DEATH). "The Speckled Band" (1892) offers up a death-dealing beastie introduced into a darkened room through a ventilator shaft. (The film naturally substitutes one of the

THE SPIDER WOMAN

Spider Woman's eight-legged freaks for the milk-loving snake of the story.) There's a specific reference to "The Devil's Foot" (1910) when poisonous fumes emanating from a candy wrapper tossed into a fireplace come close to gassing our heroes. And it's not unlikely that "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), which concerns the notorious adventuress Irene Adler — the one female adversary to ever outwit Sherlock Holmes — inspired SPIDER WOMAN's female villain. (Mind, this is a film whose opening credits inform viewers that Bertram Millhauser's script is based on a story by Conan Doyle!) The finale, at least, is all new, with Holmes trussed up in a shooting gallery behind a rotating cutout of Adolph Hitler, and the unwitting Watson coming perilously close to killing his companion in a display of expert marksmanship. (The figures of Hitler and other Axis leaders are widely regarded as the Rathbone/Bruce films' final references to World War II, though there's a grisly reference to the Germans and poison gas in 1946's DRESSED TO KILL, the very last film in the series.)

So popular was SPIDER WOMAN that it spawned a follow-up. THE SPIDER WOMAN STRIKES BACK (1946) isn't a sequel to the Sherlock Holmes adventure; instead of the sly Miss Spedding, Gale Sondergaard plays Nevada native Zenobia Dollard and is reduced to poisoning cattle and feeding spiders and human blood to carnivorous plants. (No pyjama murders here!) Universal had planned to unleash a Spider Woman series, but the studio's horror cycle was rapidly winding down and THE SPIDER WOMAN STRIKES BACK was too much the misfire to inspire further cow carnage.

Sondergaard's STRIKES BACK costar, Rondo Hatton, was slightly luckier with his own follow-up. Having played the Hoxton Creeper in the Holmes entry THE PEARL OF DEATH (1944), Hatton, who suffered from the disfiguring disease acromegaly and — as far as Universal was concerned — required no makeup to frighten the kiddies, returned as a new Creeper (sans Hoxton) in HOUSE OF HORRORS (1946). HORRORS in turn generated a genuine rarity for the period — a prequel —

with THE BRUTE MAN dramatizing The Creeper's lurid back story. By then, however, Universal had called it quits. Preparing to merge with International Pictures, the studio turned its corporate back on B films and quickly sold this last Creeper cheapie to the Poverty Row studio PRC. Hatton wasn't in a position to mind — both HOUSE OF HORRORS and THE BRUTE MAN were released following his death (February 2, 1946).

Thirty years after Zenobia Dollard struck back, Manuel Puig's novel Kiss of the Spider Woman saw publication. The book, set in a dank, grim Latin American prison, told the story of Valentin Arregui, a macho Marxist, and Luis Molina, a gay window dresser who shares Valentin's cell and spins tales drawn from the old black-and-white movies he adores.

"When someone first mentioned that book to me," Sondergaard recalled in 1984, "I became rather upset. No one mentioned that it was fiction — and I thought someone had written a biography of me! How presumptuous! Of me, I mean!"

Puig's novel was filmed in 1985 — the year of Gale Sondergaard's death — winning William Hurt an Oscar for the role of Molina. Broadway's lavish musical version opened in 1993, copping Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Book (Terrence McNally), Best Score (John Kander and Fred Ebb), Best Costume Design (Florence Klotz), Best Actor (Brent Carver as Molina), Best Featured Actor (Anthony Crivello as Valentin), and Best Actress (Chita Rivera as Aurora, the beguiling Spider Woman of Molina's fantasies).

Adrea Spedding would have smiled — silkenly, of course.



Sherlock Holmes

THE HOUSE of FEAR



When scenarist Roy Chanslor sat down to transform Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Five Orange Pips" (1891) into the screenplay for THE HOUSE OF FEAR (1945), the eighth entry in Universal's Sherlock Holmes series (and the 10th film, counting the two 20th Century Fox productions, starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce as Holmes and Watson), he faced a considerable task. At the time, "Pips" was still thought one of the foremost stories in the canon. Conan Doyle himself had chosen it as one of the 12 best Holmes adventures in a 1927 list, and the Baker Street Irregulars had included it in their first such tally, announced the year before the film's release.

Unfortunately, a number of factors rendered much of the tale's original plot unsuitable — first and foremost being the fact that Sherlock Holmes fails! (Actually, he fails twice in the stories collected in 1891's Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: not only in "The Five Orange Pips," but in his encounter with the dubious and questionable Irene Adler in "A Scandal in Bohemia.") In "Pips," client John Openshaw receives a death threat in the form of a letter containing the titular seeds, and arrives at 221B Baker Street on a storm-swept night to beg Holmes for help. The threat is not an empty one: Openshaw's uncle and father have both died after receiving kindred warnings. The Great Detective promises to investigate and sends Openshaw on his way—at which point Openshaw is promptly murdered.

In an essay for The Baker Street Dozen (Congdon & Weed, 1987), Isaac Asimov writes: "One really mysterious question is why Holmes allowed John's death . . . Why did he not say to John, 'John, old boy, stay here in my digs for a day. Watson will look after you, and I will go out and lay these villains by the heels'? . . . No, Holmes sends him out into that terrible storm and to his death and when,

1. OPEN
2. THE GOOD COMRADES
3. THE DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
4. THE FIVE ORANGE PIPS
5. A POISONOUS ATMOSPHERE
6. A LONG NIGHT'S VIGIL
7. "QUITE A KNOTTY PROBLEM."
8. LESTRADE TAKES CHARGE
9. "NO MAN GOES WHOLE TO HIS GRAVE."
10. WATSON INVESTIGATES
11. NO GHOSTS NEED APPLY
12. THE SMUGGLER'S CAVE
13. "OUR LONG AND HAPPY ASSOCIATION."
14. END CREDITS

"MURDER'S AN INSIDIOUS THING, WATSON. ONCE A MAN HAS DIPPED HIS FINGERS IN BLOOD, SOONER OR LATER HE'LL FEEL THE URGE TO KILL AGAIN."
—THE HOUSE OF FEAR

the next morning, Watson reads the paper and announces that John is dead, Holmes says, calmly, 'I feared as much . . . That hurts my pride, Watson.' And so it should. Lestrade himself would have done better."

Picture a Sherlock Holmes film in which Rathbone's Holmes behaves less sensibly than Dennis Hoey's Inspector Lestrade and you have a fair notion of Chanslor's plight.

Then there's the Case of the Troublesome Initials. Scrawled on the envelope containing the pips are the initials "KKK." Mind you, the letters are supposed to be part of the mystery. Holmes has to deduce their meaning; he doesn't instantly proclaim, "Ah, the Ku Klux Klan is behind this" even though he's already been told by his client that Colonel Elias Openshaw, John's uncle, owned slaves in Florida. For Chanslor and Universal, the problem was twofold: include the Klan clue and not only would the audience have been way ahead of the detective (a fatal flaw in any whodunit), but more than one Southern state might have taken offense at the killers' identities. (In the story, Holmes remarks that Colonel Openshaw's register and diary, which contain Klan secrets, "may implicate some of the first men in the South.")

Finally, there's the fact that almost no one in "The Five Orange Pips" does what anyone rightfully would do, given the circumstances. Case in point: Colonel Openshaw receives the pips in the envelope marked "KKK" and realizes that his former compatriots have tracked him down not only to kill him, but to retrieve the vital documents that would prove their complicity in Klan activities. Openshaw cries, "They may do what they like, but I'll check-mate them still" — and proceeds to burn the papers. In his essay, Asimov writes: "Why? Presumably, the Klansmen want the diary, but they can only want it to destroy it with all its incriminating evidence. How then does Elias' burning it checkmate them? He has done what they want to do with it and has given them what they wanted . . ."

Faced with a tale whose only workable

element was the citrous death threat, Chanslor seems to have turned to other literature for inspiration — not only to Conan Doyle, but, from all appearances, to Charles Dickens, Agatha Christie, and Robert Louis Stevenson. In lieu of the doomed Openshaw family, the screenwriter fashioned a private men's club called the Good Comrades, whose seven members receive the orange pips (first seven, then six, then five, etc.) and swiftly die till only one, Bruce Alastair, remains. Filled with eccentrics (to say the least), the Comrades resemble the Pickwick Club of Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), while the cherubic Alastair, the club's nominal head and owner of Drearcliff, the house in which the group convenes, is a strange amalgam of Samuel Pickwick and Mr. Dick from *David Copperfield* (1850) — kindly and naive to the point of near imbecility. (It perhaps stretches a point to mention that the hero of Dicken's 1861 novel *Great Expectations* is nicknamed — Pip.)

From Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1940, published in England the previous year as *Ten Little Niggers* and ultimately retitled *Ten Little Indians*) comes the plot device of an isolated group being murdered one by one, till the lone survivor must logically be stamped "killer." Conan Doyle's "The Norwood Builder" (1903) provides the edifice whose indoor and outdoor measurements strangely don't match.

Sir Arthur himself may have sought inspiration from Edinburgh-born Robert Louis Stevenson when he wrote "The Five Orange Pips" (and before it, 1890's *The Sign of Four*). Perhaps the finest example of the literary tradition of the death threat can be found in Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), in which Blind Pew delivers the black spot (a scrap of paper on which nothing save a black circle is inked) to Captain Billy Bones, a former pirate. Did Chanslor follow Conan Doyle's lead by borrowing from Stevenson? The fact that he chose Scotland for his screenplay's setting and placed its climax in a smuggler's cave beneath Drearcliff House are points not, as

THE HOUSE of FEAR

Sherlock Holmes might put it, without interest.

Imagination may have run high when Chanslor changed "The Five Orange Pips" into a workable scenario, but it was in short store when it came time to name the baby. THE HOUSE OF FEAR is one of those all-purpose titles slapped on a picture when no one can come up with anything better. Two HOUSE OF FEARS appeared in 1915, in one of which Jeanne Eagels — not yet a Broadway legend — made her film debut. Universal itself opened a HOUSE OF FEAR in 1939, a mere six years before the studio revived the title for its resident sleuth. (The 1939 HOUSE OF FEAR was a remake of the 1929 THE LAST WARNING, but Universal couldn't use THE LAST WARNING for its title because it had just been used for a Crime Club film the previous year.) RANCHO DEL MIEDO (American title: HOUSE OF FEAR) arrived from Mexico in 1971, starring Katy Jurado and the romantic lead from another filmic HOUSE (OF WAX), Paul Picerni. Unlike the titles of the three previous Holmes entries — SPIDER WOMAN, THE SCARLET CLAW, and THE PEARL OF DEATH (all 1945) — THE HOUSE OF FEAR offers no real clue as to story content, and might just as well concern a carnival attraction as a gloomy mansion in Scotland. (The film began life as THE MURDER CLUB, a much more fitting appellation.)

THE HOUSE OF FEAR — set for the most part in the solitary Drearcliff House and a nearby fishing village, with little in the way of modern conveniences in view — inhabits that timeless half-world in which it is clearly the Victorian era in all but fact. Holmes and Watson arrive at the crime scene via horse-drawn cart, and practically the only car in the film is the one in which Good Comrade Ralph King (Dick Alexander) meets his fiery doom. (Every victim suffers mutilation of some sort, the Drearcliff legend being that "no man ever goes whole to his grave.") Universal had finally confessed, in a press release, that its plans to update Holmes by having him "solve problems of the current war, in Canada and

Washington, did not meet with the expected response from devotees of the Conan Doyle mysteries." (Oddly, the mystery solved by Holmes in Canada — that of THE SCARLET CLAW — has nothing to do with World War II.) HOUSE was filmed in May 1944, with Germany's surrender still a year away, and released almost 10 months later, on March 16, 1945.

Former newsman Roy Chanslor, who had penned his own mysteries (1931's *Lowdown*) before going Hollywood, went on to write the classic Western novels *Johnny Guitar* (1952) and 1956's *The Ballad of Cat Ballou* (1956), while also mining Harold Robbins' sex sleaze territory with *The Naked I* (1953) and *Passion Makers* (1962). It can be argued that his Sherlock Holmes is no less a failure than Conan Doyle's, since three Good Comrades meet bad ends well after the Great Detective takes the case. However, there's a suggestion that Holmes is on to the entire scheme from the very start, when he arrives at Drearcliff and states that he suspects "no one but everyone." (He can hardly be held accountable for the deaths of three men who haven't really died.)

Still, it must be conceded that Sherlock Holmes may have been slightly off his game while paying a visit to THE HOUSE OF FEAR, because the essential clue and key to the entire mystery is spotted by someone else entirely — that oft-maligned gentleman named John H. Watson.

— Richard Valley is the publisher of *Scarlet Street* magazine (www.scarletstreet.com) and also a playwright whose comedies have been produced in New York, Boston, Minneapolis, and other cities.

Sherlock Holmes IN PEARL of DEATH

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